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DIGITAL ENGLISH DAILY, BENGALURU

سالار روزنامہ بنگلور

Website: salarnews.in | www.magzter.com | 6 APRIL 2026 | MONDAY | BENGALURU | 17 SHAWWAL 1447 H | Vol 5 | Issue No 85 | Pages: 8

US pulls off daring pilot rescue in Iran

Hundreds of Navy SEAL personnel and jets stopped Iranians from reaching pilot's rescue site

WASHINGTON, 5 APRIL

A US service member missing after Iran shot down an F-15E Strike Eagle has been rescued, President Donald Trump announced early Sunday. The pilot, a weapons systems officer, was recovered after a two-day "life-or-death" mission in the mountains of Iran.

The jet was downed over southwestern Iran on Friday. Both crew members ejected, with one rescued soon afterward. The second officer went into hiding in a mountain crevice, evading Iranian forces for more than 24 hours. At one point, he hiked up a 7,000-foot ridgeline. His location was initially unknown to US authorities, but the CIA tracked him, allowing a rescue to be planned.

US Special Operations forces, including Navy SEAL Team 6 commandos, carried out the operation. Hundreds of personnel were involved, supported by American aircraft that targeted Iranian convoys to prevent them from reaching the pilot. Commandos engaged Iranian forces to keep them away from the rescue site but did not enter a direct firefight.

Trump described the mission as "one of the most daring search-and-rescue operations in US history." He added that the officer sustained injuries but "will be just fine." Dozens of aircraft were used, and US forces monitored the pilot's location around the clock.

> **This is the first time in military memory that two US Pilots have been rescued, separately, deep in Enemy Territory. We will never leave an American warfighter behind!** -Donald Trump, US President

Iran had offered a reward for the capture of the pilot. At least five people were killed, and several "flying objects" were destroyed, including a transport plane, during the US operation to rescue the downed fighter jet crew member, the Iran's Revolutionary Guards said, reported Iranian media.

According to the spokesperson of Khatam al-Anbiya Central Headquarters, the unified command of the Iranian armed forces, the downed aircraft included a C-130 military transport plane in the south of Isfahan, and two Black Hawk helicopters. The rescue followed another US recovery earlier, involving a separate crew member. Trump praised the bravery and coordination of all personnel involved, noting that there were no US casualties.

In a related incident, a lone pilot was rescued after an A-10 Warthog crashed near the Strait of Hormuz. *—PTI*

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Don sends abusive Easter msg to Iran

US President Donald Trump has made an expletive-laden post demanding Iran to open the Strait of Hormuz on Easter Day. "Tuesday will be Power Plant Day, and Bridge Day, all wrapped up in one, in Iran. There will be nothing like it!!! Open the F*****g Strait, you crazy b******s, or you'll be living in Hell - JUST WATCH! Praise be to Allah," Trump said on Truth Social.

Himanta guns for Kunki's parent for 'eating beef'

JORHAT, 5 APRIL

Assam Chief Minister Himanta Biswa Sarma has said he will take action against the parents of AJP candidate Kunki Chowdhury for allegedly consuming beef and uploading a picture of it on social media. Chowdhury, 27, who is making her electoral debut from the Guwahati Central Assembly constituency, has repeatedly denied claims, terming the allegation as fake news being spread by Sarma. Polling for the 126-member Assam assembly will be held on 9 April, while the results will be declared on 4 May. In Assam, beef consumption is legal, but the Assam Cattle Preservation Act, 2021 bans cattle slaughter and beef sales in majority Hindu, Jain, and Sikh areas and within 5km of temples. *—PTI*

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Mahakal Standard Time should replace GMT: Pradhan

NEW DELHI, 5 APRIL

Union Education Minister Dharmendra Pradhan wants to replace 'Greenwich Mean Time' and establish Mahakal Standard Time (MST) in its place. Pradhan's statement was said while inaugurating the three-day 'Mahakal The Master of Time International Conference'. "Ujjain is the place where the Equator and the Tropic of Cancer meet and ancient world time calculations were made. Therefore, the time has come to logically establish MST. Claiming that the original centre of time calculation is the area around Ujjain. Claiming science is incomplete without spirituality, Pradhan called for restoring India's global scientific prestige. He cited major spiritual hubs like Ujjain and Kashi as living laboratories where science, art, and spirituality converge *—AGENCIES*

India uses 25% of global groundwater

NEW DELHI, 5 APRIL

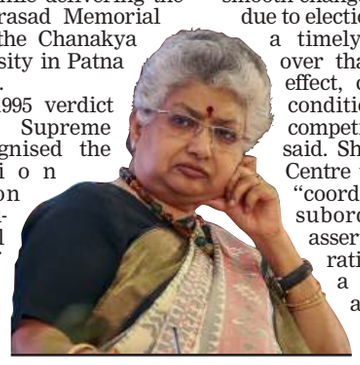
India accounts for around 25 per cent of global groundwater withdrawals, the Public Accounts Committee has flagged, and urged the Jal Shakti Ministry to persuade states to curb excessive extraction. The observations were made in the panel's 41st report, 'Ground Water Management and Regulation,' presented in the Lok Sabha on 1 April by its chairperson, KC Venugopal. India leads the world in groundwater extraction at 245 BCM, accounting for 80 per cent of drinking and 64 per cent of irrigation water. The report highlights a 'failure to prioritize sustainability,' noting that four states have exceeded 100 per cent extraction levels. The committee stressed translating existing initiatives into concrete results to ensure sustainable use of the resource. *—PTI*

Dependent EC risks poll neutrality: SC judge

NEW DELHI, 5 APRIL

Neutrality of elections cannot be assured if those who conduct polls are dependent on the contestants, Justice BV Nagarathna of the Supreme Court has said, in a veiled admonishment of the Election Commission.

The apex court judge raised a critical concern regarding the structural independence of those tasked with overseeing the ballot while delivering the Rajendra Prasad Memorial Lecture at the Chanakya Law University in Patna on Saturday.



Citing a 1995 verdict where the Supreme Court recognised the Election Commission as a constitutional authority of high significance, entrusted with ensuring the integrity of elections, she said, "The concern, once again, was structural: if those who conduct elections are dependent on those who contest them, the neutrality of the process cannot be assured."

Justice Nagarathna said elections are not merely periodic events but a mechanism through which political authority is constituted.

"Our constitutional democracy has amply demonstrated smooth changes in government due to elections being held on a timely basis. Control over that process is, in effect, control over the conditions of political competition itself," she said. She also urged the Centre to view states as "coordinates and not subordinates" and asserted that the separation of powers was a "constitutional arrangement of co-equals." *—PTI*

345 fishers stranded in Iran return

NEW DELHI, 5 APRIL

A group of 345 Indian fishermen, who were stranded in Iran returned to India via Armenia on Saturday, officials said.

External Affairs Minister S Jaishankar thanked his Armenian counterpart Ararat Mirzoyan for helping Indians.

The Indians arrived in Chennai on Saturday. The circumstances that led to them being stranded in Iran are not known.

Around 1,500 Indians have left Iran via land through Armenia and Azerbaijan so far.

The Centre said the Ministry of External Affairs continues to closely monitor the situation in West Asia.

It also made a mention of five Indians being injured in Abu Dhabi on Friday.

According to Abu Dhabi authorities, the Indians were among the 12 people injured by missile debris.

It said the Indian mission in Abu Dhabi is extending assistance, adding that their flight is expected to reach India soon.

Minister Piyush Goyal welcomes fishermen at the Chennai Airport *—ANI*

Around 6,000 workers from UP in Israel are safe. The UP government is maintaining continuous contact with Indian authorities on the ground, officials said on Sunday.

Principal Secretary Labour and Employment Department, Uttar Pradesh, Shanmuga Sundaram, is in regular contact with the Indian Embassy in Israel. According to information received from the embassy, all Indians in Israel are safe.

Meanwhile, Air India has suspended flights to Israel till 31 May. An Air India executive confirmed that the airline has suspended flights on the New Delhi-Tel Aviv route till 31 May.

Indians trying to leave Israel have to go through Jordan or Egypt through land crossings. *— PTI*

RBI likely to hold rates in April due to inflation fears

MUMBAI, 5 APRIL

RBI is likely to keep the benchmark policy repo rate unchanged at 5.25 per cent at its April monetary policy review, as the Iran wars fuels inflationary pressures.

A poll of over a dozen economists highlighted that tensions in West Asia, volatile commodity prices, and sharp currency movements, pushing the rupee to record lows, have complicated the policy outlook.

"RBI is likely to remain on pause and closely monitor inflation data," said Aditi Nayar, Chief Economist at ICRA. SBI Chief Economist Soumya Kanti Ghosh added that crude above USD 100 per barrel and the rupee hovering above 93 per dollar have caused a rise in imported inflation. *— PTI*

EASTER JOY

Children pick up chocolates and eggs during Easter celebrations at St Andrew's Church on Cubbon Road in Bengaluru on Sunday following special prayers *—MOHAMMED ASAD*

They called 'Dhurandhar', 'Kerala Files' a lie & now FCRA Bill: PM

T'PURAM, 5 APRIL

People terming films like 'Kerala Files', 'Kashmir Files' and 'Dhurandhar' as "lies" are spreading lies about the foreign contribution amendment bill and universal civil code, Prime Minister Narendra Modi said in Kerala.

At a BJP-led alliance's rally in Pathanamthitta, Modi reached out to the now politically important Christian community in the state, which his party has tried to attract amid attacks on Christians in north India and concerns over the proposed Foreign Contribution Regulation (Amendment) Bill 2026.

He cited the instance of Goa, where the uniform civil code has been in place for decades.

The Catholic Bishops Conference of India, the highest body of the Catholic Church in the country is among those who have opposed the Modi government's proposed amendments to the bill.

Prime Minister Narendra Modi addresses a rally ahead of Bengal elections in Cooch Behar on Sunday *—PTI*

"The NDA has formed governments in six northeastern states having a significant Christian population. We have delivered on work that was pending for decades," Modi said. Basic infrastructure was poor in Kerala's rural areas as the LDF and UDF did not pay attention to that, he alleged. He said that NDA has spent five times more on development in Kerala than UPA regimes.

Modi also referred to the migration of youth from Kerala for jobs as the state's biggest problem. *—Agencies*

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'DID BIDDERS MENTION ED?'

CIC flays IRCTC for denying RTI info on Rail Neer scam

NEW DELHI, 5 APRIL

The Central Information Commission has pulled up the IRCTC, the catering arm of the Indian Railways, over the denial of information on an RTI plea seeking to know if companies bidding for railway tenders had disclosed their alleged links to the Rail Neer 'scam' and related cases probed by central agencies.

The RTI applicant had asked the Indian Railway Catering and Tourism Corporation (IRCTC) if the bidders clearly mentioned the CBI or ED cases against their names, if any, in their tender documents.

The Rail Neer 'scam' was a 2015 corruption case investigated by the CBI, in which private catering companies supplied cheap bottled water instead of the mandated 'Rail Neer' on premium trains (Rajdhani and Shatabdi), causing the Indian Railways a loss of about Rs 19.5 crore.

The RTI specifically asked if the bidders declared that they were "accused in the famous Rail Neer scam" and that the CBI had "registered an FIR (RC-DAI-2015-A-0032) against them" and the ED had "registered a case under sections 120B.

The IRCTC, however, denied the data, saying, "The information sought is exempted from disclosure as per Section 8(d) of the Right to Information Act, 2005."

Examining the matter, the Central Information Commission (CIC) found the IRCTC response inadequate and directed the IRCTC to revisit the RTI application and provide a "fresh, reasoned reply". *—PTI*

Yadgir woman gangraped while answering nature's call

YADGIR, 5 APRIL

Two youths were arrested on Saturday for gangraping a woman when she went out in a field to defecate at a village in Yadgir.

The crime reportedly occurred after the victim informed her family about a love affair.

Police said the victim was returning home on Friday evening after being out in the open when Basappa, 25, intercepted her. He questioned her about why she had informed family members of his alleged relationship with her sister-in-law and dragged her away. Basappa then called his friend Raddeppa, 30, to the scene. Together, the two allegedly gangraped the woman and threatened to kill her if she disclosed the incident. The victim approached the Women's Police Station and lodged a complaint. Police registered a case and launched an operation, taking both accused into custody on Saturday. *—Salar News*

Truck driver kills self after cops catch him drunk

BENGALURU, 5 APRIL

After testing positive for drunk driving during a routine police check, a truck driver allegedly died by suicide, police said. On Saturday night, traffic police intercepted a Tamil Nadu-registered truck for inspection near the Outer Ring Road under the JP Nagar station limits. Officials impounded the vehicle and issued a notice to the driver after he tested positive for drunk driving. On Sunday morning, police received information that he had died by suicide. CCTV and body-worn camera footage show the driver was in good condition while leaving after receiving the notice. A detailed investigation will look into all angles, police said, adding that the deceased's family has been informed. *—PTI*

Help is available. Please call Tele Manas at 14416, or SAHAI at 080-25497777 for support.

19 held for gambling, Rs 9 lakh seized

CHIKKABALLAPUR, 5 APRIL

The Pathapalya police in Chikkaballapura district raided a gambling gang, arrested 19 people and seized around Rs 9 lakh on Friday. The police received information that some people including some from Andhra Pradesh were gambling, including playing the outlawed 'andhar bahar' game on the tank bund in Tholapalli village.

The police led by Circle Inspector M Srinivas and PSI Ganesh rushed to the village along with eyewitnesses. Near the village tank they found 21 people allegedly engaged in gambling. On seeing the police two people fled. The police arrested 19 people and seized the stake money, 15 phones, and some two-wheelers. *—SALAR NEWS*

Biocon chief flays NHAI over poor condition of NH-44 in City

BENGALURU, 5 APRIL

Biocon Chief Kiran Mazumdar-Shawon Sunday criticised the National Highway Authority of India (NHAI) over the poor maintenance of NH44, the key IT corridor connecting Bengaluru to Hosur.

In a post on social media platform X, Shaw described the highway's medians and barricades as "terrible" and said the unpaved shoulders created an "eyesore" for commuters. She questioned whether the condition of this stretch reflects NHAI's reputation as a developer of national road infrastructure.

"Whilst NHAI boasts of its road infrastructure across the country, why is the country's key IT corridor NH44 (formerly NH7) so shoddily designed and ill-maintained?" she wrote.

Shaw tagged Union Road Transport Minister Nitin Gadkari and NHAI's official social media handle, highlighting that multiple complaints by people and different organisations over the years had gone unanswered. "Is this what NHAI considers its proud track record?" she asked.

The Biocon chief's post has drawn attention to the longstanding concerns of commuters and IT professionals who frequently travel through the stretch, calling for urgent intervention to improve safety and road quality on this vital corridor.

Shaw had also taken to task municipalities in citie for their negligence on problems faced by the people. *—PTI*

K'taka denied Rs 2L cr by Centre: Surjewala

Calls it BJP's 'anti-Kannadiga vendetta'

BENGALURU, 5 APRIL

AICC General Secretary **Randeep Singh Surjewala** on Sunday said that the Modi-led government and the BJP's "anti-Kannadiga vendetta" have been exposed, as Karnataka is "denied" its rightful dues of about Rs 2 lakh crore by the Centre.

He added that the deliberate silence of the Karnataka BJP regarding the Modi government's "step-motherly treatment" of Kannadigas' rights and interests cannot remain unpunished, asserting that the BJP has "betrayed" Karnataka and does not deserve the vote.

Speaking to reporters, he said the BJP is "harmful" for Karnataka, accusing the saffron party-led government at the Centre of denying budgetary dues, blocking development, and opposing the five Congress guarantees (Shakti, Gruha Lakshmi, Gruha Jyoti, Yuva Nidhi and Anna Bhagya).

"BJP has betrayed Karnataka, and it does not deserve the vote of Kannadigas," he added.

"In total, the direct loss to the people of Karnataka due to the BJP's brazen fiscal injustice is Rs 1,97,257 crore, almost Rs 2 lakh crore. Will the BJP leaders answer before seeking votes in Davanagere South and Bagalkot?" he asked. -

Alleging the BJP's conspiracy to block agrarian, irrigation, defence, and infrastructure projects in the state, Surjewala claimed it is "an act of revenge" against Kannadigas.

Citing issues concerning various irrigation and drinking water projects pending before the Centre—like the Upper Bhadra River project, Mahadayi (Kalasa-Banduri) project, Yettinahole drinking water project, and Mekedatu irrigation & drinking water project—he said, "BJP leaders of Karnataka, including the union ministers of BJP and JDS, neither have the guts to question the PM nor utter a word seeking justice for Kannadigas."

The AICC general secretary said Karnataka has been denied a defence corridor by the BJP government at the Centre despite contributing 67 per cent of India's aerospace and defence manufacturing.

Karnataka has been deliberately denied approval for DPR clearance for a "plastic park" in Mangaluru by the union government, he said. *—PTI*

Cong wants to win with money: BSY

Vijayendra says CM is having sleepless nights

BAGALKOT/ DAVANGERE, 5 APRIL

Veteran BJP leader **B S Yediyurappa** on Sunday alleged that Congress leaders came to campaign for bypolls two Karnataka constituencies with "suitcases full of money", under the illusion that they can win with cash, liquor and muscle power.

But people will "teach them a lesson," the former Chief Minister told reporters.

He also accused the Congress government in the state of indulging in corruption, "intoxicated by power".

"There is no need to have any doubt. They (ruling Congress leaders) have come with suitcases full of money under the illusion that they can win the election with money, liquor and muscle power," Yediyurappa said, taking a dig at CM Siddaramaiah and his cabinet for camping in poll bound constituencies for about a week now.

People have decided to ensure the victory of BJP candidates, and will reject the Congress' allurements, he added.

Yediyurappa alleged that the Congress was indulging in a "daylight robbery" by emptying the government's treasury.

Responding to a question, he said, the minority Muslim community is also aware of the Congress' "true colours", and will not fall for their allurements. "I think they too will stand by us," he added.

In Davangere, BJP State President BY Vijayendra took a sharp swipe at Karnataka Chief Minister Siddaramaiah, claiming that he is "having sleepless nights" ahead of the upcoming by-elections, while expressing confidence in the Bharatiya Janata Party's victory in both Bagalkote and Davanagere South constituencies.

Speaking to reporters, Vijayendra said that the ruling Congress party would not benefit from any factor in the by-polls and asserted that the BJP is set to secure victories in both seats.

"In the by-election, no factor is going to help the ruling Congress Party. In both constituencies, the BJP will win. Siddaramaiah is a very confused person. Confused because he is very much aware Congress is going to lose in Bagalkot as well as Davangere. I am sure Siddaramaiah is having sleepless nights these days ," he said. *—PTI*

JAGJIVAN RAM JAYANTHI

Chief Minister Siddaramaiah along with ministers HC Mahadevappa and KH Muniyappa pay tribute to former deputy prime minister Babu Jagjivan Ram on his 119th birth anniversary at Vidhana Soudha in Bengaluru on Sunday, as folk artistes perform. ***—MOHAMMAD ASAD***

Concern is who benefits from delimitation: CM

BENGALURU, 5 APRIL

Karnataka Chief Minister Siddaramaiah on Sunday said the concern is not whether the number of seats in the Lok Sabha are increased, but how the expansion is carried out and who benefits "disproportionately".

He alleged that having "failed" to win the trust of southern people, Prime Minister Narendra Modi's government is now attempting to weaken the region's voice through a "manipulative restructuring of representation."

Modi had said that Lok Sabha seats would not be reduced in South Indian states that have successfully controlled population and the total number of seats will increase to benefit states across the country.

The Lok Sabha and Rajya Sabha will take up legislation, including increasing Lok Sabha seats from 543 to 816 to implement women's reservation.

BJP-dominated states see an increase in seats as compared to the Southern states, Siddaramaiah said.

Five southern states together gain barely 63–66 additional seats, while seven BJP-dominated states gain about 128–131 seats.

He argued that after the expansion of the Lok Sabha to 816 seats, the collective share of southern states would remain around 24 per cent "unchanged and already modest".

Siddaramaiah claimed that Karnataka risks being deliberately sidelined and such a structural change cannot be pushed without proper consultations or public debate. *—PTI*

Auto drivers struggle as LPG crisis hits fuel bunkers in Mandya

MANDYA, 5 APRIL

The ongoing shortage of LPG has disrupted operations at local auto fuel bunkers in Karnataka's Mandya, impacting the daily livelihoods of auto drivers. The shortage has been linked to escalating tensions and ongoing conflicts in West Asia, which have affected LPG supply for both domestic and commercial purposes.

Several fuel bunkers across the city have remained closed for days, leaving drivers unable to refuel their vehicles and continue regular operations. Many drivers, reliant on daily fares and burdened by vehicle loans, are increasingly anxious over the deepening uncertainty.

Drivers have appealed to the government to intervene and ensure LPG supply resumes swiftly, emphasising that continued disruptions could severely impact their livelihoods and push many into financial distress.

Staff confirmed the bunker's closures stem from an acute gas shortage, with no timeline for resuming normal operations. With bunkers closed, drivers have been forced to park their vehicles near fuel stations, waiting in vain for supplies to resume.

Autorickshaw drivers in Bengaluru lined up at the KS Town LPG bunk for refills, marking the second day of queues after a gap— ***MOHAMMAD ASAD***

Indian Navy warships have been on standby to provide support to merchant vessels as the Centre continues negotiations with Iranian authorities to ensure safe passage amid a maritime blockade. In the meantime, shipments of LPG are continuing to arrive in India.

On Friday night, the India-flagged gas carrier Green Sanvi safely transited a strategic maritime chokepoint carrying approximately 46,650 metric tonnes of LPG, officials said

The gas carrier arrived in the country after a 47,000 MT shipment had reached Gujarat's Vadinar Terminal on 28 March via the MT Jag Vasant, which is scheduled for a Ship-to-Ship anchorage. *—ANI*

IOCL strengthens auto LPG distribution in K'taka

BENGALURU, 5 APRIL

Indian Oil Corporation Limited (IOCL) said on Sunday that it is actively strengthening Auto LPG distribution across its network in Karnataka to address the surge in demand arising from the ongoing West Asia conflict.

Bengaluru is witnessing disruptions in auto-rickshaw services due to a shortage. It also noted that about 70 per cent of the auto-rickshaw fleet has dual-fuel capability, for both Auto LPG and petrol use.

"In Karnataka there are 72 ALDS, with IOCL accounting for 55 of these outlets. In comparison, over 300 ALDS were operated by private players. Now, nearly 80 per cent of these private stations have become non-operational," Indian Oil Corporation Limited said in a release.

Stating that IOCL has scaled up its supply in Karnataka with the support of the Government of India. Average daily supply was 43.5 MT per day in February, increased to 59.53 MT per day in March and has been further ramped up to 68.53 MT per day with effect from 4 April.

- Bengaluru is witnessing disruptions in auto-rickshaw services due to a shortage. 70 per cent of the auto-rickshaw fleet has dual-fuel capability, for both LPG and petrol use.

The company said PSU-operated outlets are retailing Auto LPG at Rs 89.52 per litre in Bengaluru, whereas private marketers are selling it between Rs 99 and Rs 105 per litre.

Infrastructure constraints and private outlet closures are limiting LPG supply recovery, and users are advised to switch to petrol instead. *—PTI*

PHONE LOCATION TRACED

Kerala woman found 4 days after she went missing while trekking in Kodagu

BENGALURU, 5 APRIL

A 36-year-old woman from Kerala, who went missing while trekking in the Tadiandamol hills of Kodagu district four days ago, has been found safe, the office of Karnataka Forest Minister Eshwar Khandre confirmed on Sunday. She is currently being brought back.

GS Sharanya had travelled alone from Kerala and was staying at a private homestay in Kakkabe village. On 2 April, she set out for the high mountain range with a guide and 15 other trekkers but went missing that afternoon. She last contacted the homestay by phone, reporting that she had lost her way.

Following her disappearance,

GS Sharanya; People searching for the missing woman ***—SCREENGRAB***

five search teams comprising 50 personnel, including police, the anti-Naxal squad, a dog squad and forest staff, were immediately deployed. Later, four additional teams of 40 personnel were added, bringing the total to nine teams. Sophisticated thermal drones were also used, and local tribal residents assisted in the search.

Earlier, Karnataka Chief Minister Siddaramaiah instructed authorities to intensify the operation. Kerala Chief Minister Pinarayi Vijayan had written to Siddaramaiah urging urgent personal intervention and requesting the search teams' strength be augmented to ensure Sharanya's safe return.

Minister Khandre said, "We conducted the search based on her last phone location. Local people have been helping in the effort." Sharanya, an IT professional, will be safely reunited with her family once she returns from the trek. *—PTI*

ISIS module with K'taka based operatives busted

AMARAVATI, 5 APRIL

A terror module with suspected links to foreign handlers and extremist organisations, including ISIS, allegedly involved in radicalising youth in Indian states including Karnataka has been unearthed.

An intelligence department source said on Sunday that prime accused Rahamathullah Sharif and his associates were in contact with operatives engaged in spreading jihadi propaganda and motivating youth through online videos.

Earlier, the Andhra Pradesh police deployed teams across Bihar, Delhi, Karnataka, Maharashtra, West Bengal, Telangana and Rajasthan to arrest a dozen suspects including three from the southern state linked to the network.

Investigators suspect that women were encouraged to join a separate 'Khawateen' wing as part of the group's expansion strategy.

"A jihadi module with links to foreign handlers and extremist organisations like Islamic State of Iraq and Syria (ISIS) and Al-Qaeda in the Indian Subcontinent (AQIS) has been unearthed, which was engaged in radicalising youth in India," intelligence department official said.

The group was actively sharing extremist content and maintaining links with foreign handlers.

The accused allegedly circulated videos of Osama Bin Laden, Israr Ahmed Shaik, Zakir Naik and Anwar al-Awlaki to influence Muslim youth towards jihad and extremist ideologies.

Police found that the group had established contact with handlers based in Pakistan, Afghanistan, Syria and Bangladesh through over 40 social media accounts. *—PTI*

Explosive thrown at TV channel office in Kerala

KOLLAM, 5 APRIL

An explosive substance was thrown at a TV channel's office in Kollam on Sunday morning, police reported. CCTV visuals showed two individuals arriving on a two-wheeler, with one tossing a flaming bottle at the building. The incident occurred around 3am while two journalists were sleeping inside and did not hear anything. Later, a driver employed by the channel noticed a burnt step and fragments of the bottle, and informed the journalists and police. Statements are being recorded, and forensic examination is awaited to determine the contents. Police said they will register a case once investigations are complete. The motive remains unclear at this stage. *—PTI*

—WIKIPEDIA

TTAADC polls: BJP vows Kokborok recognition

AGARTALA, 5 APRIL

Tripura Chief Minister Manik Saha unveiled the BJP's election manifesto for the 12 April tribal council polls. The party promises recognition for Kokborok language, a masterplan for Khumulwng, a football academy, and a medical college. The BJP plans to rename TTAADC as TATC, preserve tribal laws, and promote development. Saha highlighted allegations of corruption in Tipra Motha-run TTAADC and assured action if elected. The manifesto includes skilling tribal youth, establishing a medical college, and extending development schemes. Saha stated the BJP will win all 28 seats and accelerate progress in tribal areas, praising Modi's initiatives. The party's key figures, including Rajib Bhattacharjee, Bikash Debbarma, and Rebati Tripura, attended the event. *—PTI*

Perpetrators of Chandigarh blast held in Rewari

CHANDIGARH, 5 APRIL

Two men believed to be the main perpetrators of the 1 April blast outside Punjab BJP headquarters have been arrested, Punjab DGP Gaurav Yadav announced. Gurtej Singh and Amanpreet Singh were detained in Haryana's Rewari on Saturday night. The explosion at Chandigarh's Sector 37 damaged cars and a scooter but caused no casualties. The police earlier identified the device as a hand grenade. Amanpreet has a criminal record, including theft in Mohali and snatching in Himachal. Gurtej reportedly contacted a Pakistan-based contact and was asked to collect grenades and weapons. Seven persons have been arrested, with evidence suggesting Pak's ISI backing the module. *—PTI*

Cong fields Akash More against DyCM in Baramati bypoll

MUMBAI, 5 APRIL

The Congress on Sunday fielded state unit secretary Akash More against Maharashtra Deputy Chief Minister Sunetra Pawar for the Baramati bypoll scheduled on 23 April. He is the son of former party MLC Vijayrao More, Congress leaders said. He will file his nomination papers on Monday, the last date for the process. Currently a Rajya Sabha member, Sunetra Pawar too will file her nomination papers on Monday. Sunetra on Sunday dialled state Congress Chief Harshwardhan Sapkal and urged him to ensure an unopposed bypoll. The NCP has already announced it would not contest, as a mark of respect for the late Ajit Pawar. Counting will take place on 4 May. *—PTI*

Cong alleges Himanta's wife holds 3 passports

Assam CM rejects the claims, calls it 'malicious & fabricated'

NEW DELHI/GUWAHATI, 5 APRIL

The Congress on Sunday alleged that Assam Chief Minister Himanta Biswa Sarma's wife Riniki Bhuyan Sharma possesses passports of three countries and that he concealed information about her properties, but the BJP leader "categorically rejected" the claims as "malicious" and "fabricated" and vowed to take legal action "within 48 hours".

Targeting Sarma as the campaign peaks for the 9 April election in Assam, Congress' media and publicity department head Pawan Khera showed, at a press conference, purported documents to support the allegations and demanded that the Election Commission cancel his nomination for allegedly concealing information in his poll affidavit.

Hitting back at Khera, Sarma said that as Assam moves decisively towards a historic mandate.

Riniki Bhuyan Sharma with husband Assam Chief Minister Himanta Biswa Sarma *—RINIKIBHUYANSHARMA*

Sarma said his wife and he will be filing both criminal and civil defamation cases within the next 48 hours against Khera for making "reckless and defamatory statements".

Khera claimed that she has a UAE Passport, which was issued on 14 March, 2022 and expires on 13 March, 2027.

He claimed the second passport in her name is from Antigua and Barbuda, which was issued from 26 August, 2021, and expires on 25 August, 2031.

Khera also alleged that the third passport in her name is from Egypt which was issued on 13 February, 2022 and expires on 12 February, 2029.

Khera also alleged that Sarma's wife owns a company based in Wyoming, USA. The list of members for this company includes the names of the couple and their son, he claimed.

Meanwhile, in Assam, political parties are intensifying efforts to secure the support of the influential tea tribe, a voting bloc that could decide outcomes in dozens of constituencies. With around 35 lakh voters, the community holds sway in over 35 seats, primarily in eastern Assam, and can influence results in at least 10 more in the 126-member assembly. *—PTI*

> **Zubeen Garg worked his entire life to unite people of Assam; he never misbehaved with anyone. The Congress philosophy is also like that, to spread love against hatred**
>
>
>
> -Rahul Gandhi, Congress leader

Prime Minister Narendra Modi being felicitated by Union Minister of State and BJP leader Sukanta Majumdar, in Cooch Behar, West Bengal *—PTI*

PM calls judicial officers' gherao 'maha jungleraj'

KOLKATA, 5 APRIL

- PM said the entire country had seen how judicial officers were held hostage in Malda, and asked what kind of government could not ensure the safety of judges and constitutional procedures.

Prime Minister Narendra Modi on Sunday launched a blistering attack on the TMC over the Malda incident in which judicial officers were gheraoed for hours by a mob, terming it an example of the ruling party's "maha jungleraj".

Addressing his first election rally in Cooch Behar district after the announcement of polls last month, Modi said the entire country had seen how judicial officers were held hostage in Malda, and asked what kind of government could not ensure the safety of judges and constitutional procedures. He alleged that the state's ruling party was hell-bent on carrying out the "funeral procession" of law and order in Bengal.

"We cannot expect such a government to keep the people of Bengal safe," he said.

The PM also charged the TMC with opposing the Citizenship (Amendment) Act and the Special Intensive Revision (SIR) exercise to protect infiltrators.

BJP TO SEEK VOTES IN MODI'S NAME

Amid speculations on the BJP's chief ministerial face in the West Bengal assembly polls, state BJP President Samik Bhattacharya said the party had not taken any decision on the matter and would instead seek votes in the name of Prime Minister Narendra Modi and his "development agenda". *—PTI*

LDF, UDF accuse BJP of distributing kits in Thrissur

THRISSUR, 5 APRIL

The allegations of kit distribution by the BJP triggered a row here on Sunday with clashes breaking out between BJP activists and the UDF and the LDF in Manaloor ahead of the 9 April Assembly polls.

The activists of the two fronts laid siege to a godown at Vadanappally here, claiming that kits were being made and distributed from there and prevented local BJP leader film actor **Devan**, who was present inside from leaving.

UDF candidate TN Prathapan, who reached the godown, claimed that over 4,000 kits were ready for distribution and that material for making another 10,000 kits is stored there.

He demanded that BJP leaders inside the godown should be arrested and said that UDF activists will not leave the area till that is done. His other demands included seizure of the godown and the vehicles there, which he claimed were brought there to transport the kits.

Similar allegations and demands were made by the LDF activists too. They also clashed with BJP activists who arrived at the godown after coming to know that their leaders were unable to leave. The police were unable to make the UDF and LDF activists to leave. Central forces were also deployed at the site. *—PTI*

> **Ideologically, there is no change in our (LDF) stand. We respect all religions. We don't want the votes of religious fanatics, but we will accept the votes of all human beings**
>
>
>
> -Binoy Viswam, CPI Kerala Secretary

BJP opposes infiltrators, not Muslims: Gadkari

NEW DELHI, 5 APRIL

Asserting that the BJP is opposed to infiltrators and is not against Muslims, Union Minister **Nitin Gadkari** on Sunday exuded confidence about the party's prospects in Assam and West Bengal.

Assembly polls in Assam are scheduled for 9 April, while West Bengal will vote in two phases on 23 and 29 April, with counting scheduled on 4 May.

"I strongly believe that we will win in both Assam and West Bengal. We are opposed to infiltrators but are not against Muslims," Gadkari said in an interview with PTI.

Highlighting the party's development plank, he said large scale infrastructure investments was a key pillar of the BJP's strategy.

"Projects worth about Rs 5 lakh crore are being implemented across the northeast. Infrastructure projects valued at around Rs 1.5 lakh crore have already been completed, while projects worth Rs 1.5 lakh to Rs 2 lakh crore verare under implementation. In addition, projects worth another Rs 2 lakh crore are in the pipeline," he said.

These initiatives are aimed at improving connectivity, boosting trade, and accelerating economic growth.

"This push will change the face of Assam and the Northeast, a region that has historically faced connectivity challenges," he said. *—PTI*

NEW DELHI, 5 APRIL

The Enforcement authorities across the poll-going states of West Bengal, Assam, Kerala and Tamil Nadu and Puducherry have seized over Rs 650 crore worth of illicit cash, drugs and liquor meant to allure voters, the Election Commission said on Sunday.

According to data shared by the poll authority, Rs 319 crore of illicit cash, drugs, liquor and valuable metals have been seized from West Bengal. It also seized Rs 170 crore in Tamil Nadu.

Over 5,173 flying squads have been deployed to ensure that the complaints are attended to within 100 minutes.

Besides this, over 5,200 static surveillance teams (SSTs) have also been deployed for setting up surprise nakas (broadly, barricades) at different locations, the poll authority said.

While Kerala, Assam and Puducherry go to the polls on 9 April, voting in West Bengal will be in two phases on 23 and 29 April. Tamil Nadu will have Assembly polls in a single phase on 23 April.

Assembly bypolls will also be held in eight seats across six states in the country on 9 and 23 April.

The data, EC said, has been collated from the electronic seizure management system.

While Assembly elections and by-elections were announced on 15 March, the electronic seizure management system was activated on 26 February. *—PTI*

On Easter, Shah seeks support from Kerala's Christian community

KOCHI/T'PURAM, 5 APRIL

Union Home Minister Amit Shah on Sunday reached out to the Christian community on Easter, urging support for the BJP-led NDA to form a government in Kerala ahead of the 9 April assembly polls.

Speaking at meetings in Kunnathunadu and Kattakada, he said, "I appeal to my brothers and sisters in the Christian community to stand with the NDA and help form a prosperous Kerala." He promised Kerala's first AIIMS within two years of an NDA government and alleged misappropriation of Sabarimala gold, saying culprits would be jailed within two months.

Shah attacked Rahul Gandhi as a "liar" and criticised Chief Minister Pinarayi Vijayan, alleging he renames central schemes for credit.

He said, "Kerala is not safe" under LDF and UDF, accusing both of corruption and "two-faced" politics. He added, "A developed, safe and modern Kerala can be built only under a NDA government." *—PTI*

Union Home Minister Amit Shah during a roadshow ahead of the Kerala Assembly election, in Kozhikode, Kerala *—PTI*

LOPSIDED NUMBER GAME

Modi's LS seats plan weapon of mass distraction: Congress

NEW DELHI, 5 APRIL

The Congress on Sunday launched a scathing attack on Prime Minister Narendra Modi over the proposal to increase Lok Sabha seats, saying he is "bulldozing" the move that will work more to the benefit of larger and populous states and is nothing but a "Weapon of Mass Distraction (WMD)".

The opposition party also alleged that the prime minister is "hoodwinking" the people of the country and is making misleading statements that are meant to deceive.

In a post on X, Congress general secretary in-charge communications Jairam Ramesh said, "The PM is up to his usual tricks of making misleading statements that are meant to deceive.

He says South Indian states will not be hurt in any way if the strength of the Lok Sabha is increased by 50 per cent and the number of seats of each state in the Lok Sabha is also increased by 50 per cent."

For example, the difference between UP's and Kerala's seats in the Lok Sabha is now 60 and Modi's proposal will increase it to 90, he said. Similarly, the difference between UP and Tamil Nadu will increase from 41 to at least 61, Ramesh said.

Tagging Ramesh's post, Congress MP Manish Tewari said the framing by PM Modi is absolutely erroneous.

"The framing must be how much will Southern India, Western India, North Eastern India and North Western India lose in terms of political heft as compared to the Hindi heartland states of India in terms of the gap in the number of Parliamentary seats between them and the Hindi heartland states," Tewari said. *—PTI*

Superstar of 2026 polls is DMK manifesto: Stalin

VIRUDHUNAGAR, 5 APRIL

Calling the DMK's election manifesto the 'superstar of the 2026 polls', Tamil Nadu Chief Minister **MK Stalin** on Sunday asserted that while anyone can give promises, the public only trusts those made by his party.

Addressing a public meeting of the Secular Progressive Alliance here, he detailed several "superstar" highlights, most notably the 'Illatharasi' (Homemaker) scheme that offers a Rs 8,000 coupon for women to purchase household appliances.

He also pledged to double the 'Maghalir Urimai Thogai' monthly assistance from Rs 1,000 to Rs 2,000.

Stalin also termed the Assembly election as a battle between the "Tamil Nadu Team" and the "Delhi Team".

Stalin accused AIADMK Chief Edappadi K Palaniswami of basing his campaign on "slander and low-level talk". He labelled him a "liar" and the "image of betrayal".

Meanwhile, DMK leader and state Deputy Chief Minister Udhayanidhi Stalin said that the Assembly elections was a decisive battle for state autonomy, and argued for sending the "Delhi Team," back home.

Deputy Chief Minister Udhayanidhi further called incumbent MLA and AIADMK candidate C Vijayabaskar a "drama company actor", who is part of a "slave group" being threatened by central agencies. *—PTI*

Vijay's new affidavit has 2 criminal cases

TVK Chief **Vijay**, who had earlier filed an affidavit with no pending criminal cases, has now declared two pending FIRs in a fresh affidavit filed before the returning officer for the ensuing Tamil Nadu Assembly elections. The fresh affidavit, notarised on 3 April, was filed on 4 April by a representative, according to sources. It lists two cases in Chennai and Madurai that were not included in the previous document, notarised on 30 March. His financial declarations remained largely consistent across both filings.

—SCREENGRAB

Three dead in gas leak in Bihar's Dhanbad district

DHANBAD, 5 APRIL

Three persons died allegedly in a gas leak in Jharkhand's Dhanbad district in the early hours of Sunday, police said. The incident happened in Munidih around 1am, they said. "As per preliminary investigation, some people went to steal iron scrap. It appears they might have cut through a gas cylinder that was full. The smell was so strong that they fainted," said Manika Tiwari, in charge of the Munidih police station. Dhanbad SSP Prabhat Kumar said three people have died in the incident. Shaheed Nirmal Mahato Medical College and Hospital superintendent Dinesh Kumar Gindoria said five people were brought to the hospital. "Two of them were brought dead, and one died during treatment," he said. —*PTI*

Govt medicine diversion racket busted, five held

NEW DELHI, 5 APRIL

Delhi Police has unearthed a racket involved in illegal diversion and sale of government-supplied medicines meant for free distribution in hospitals and seized drugs worth Rs 70 lakh, an official said on Sunday. Five persons, including a pharmacist and a contractual helper posted at the Deen Dayal Upadhyay Hospital, have been arrested in connection with the case, police said in a statement. The accused were identified as Neerej Kumar, Sushil Kumar, Laxman Mukhia, Binesh Kumar and Prakash Mehto. "Medicines worth around Rs 70 lakh, along with a tempo and a car used for transportation, were recovered from their possession," the officer said. The racket had been operational for over a year, police said. —*PTI*

Teen stabs uncle, cousin to death during wedding

WARDHA, 5 APRIL

A land dispute took a bloody turn in Maharashtra's Wardha district on Sunday after a minor allegedly stabbed his uncle and cousin to death during a wedding procession, police said. The incident, which occurred in Barbadi village around 10.30 am, triggered panic in the area, an official said. An argument broke out between the teen, his uncle, Prabhakar Bhalme, 50, and cousin Ritesh, 24, during a wedding procession, and the accused brutally attacked them with a knife in a fit of anger, killing them on the spot, he said. The family members had a long-standing land dispute, and prima facie, the attack appears to be a fallout of the same, the official said. —*PTI*

—FREEPIK

Man booked for Rs 1.66 cr black magic fraud

THANE, 5 APRIL

A family from Maharashtra's Thane district was allegedly swindled of more than Rs 1.66 crore by a man who exploited their fear of "black magic" and promised them divine remedies through elaborate rituals and pilgrimages, police said on Sunday. The Kasarvadavali police district on 2 April registered a first information report (FIR) against Manjunath Shetty, a resident of Andheri in Mumbai. The complaint said the accused manipulated the family over two years to "neutralise black magic" performed by a relative. He allegedly took Rs 10 lakh in cash and about Rs 1.56 crore through transfers, while no arrest has been made yet, police said. —*PTI*

AI171 crash victims' kin ask PM for black box data

Kin say if data can't be publicised, it must be given to them

AHMEDABAD, 5 APRIL

Ten months after the Air India plane crash that killed 260 persons, bereaved families of the victims have written to Prime Minister Narendra Modi, demanding the release of the Cockpit Voice Recorder (CVR) and black box data.

Air India flight AI 171, a Boeing 787-8 aircraft en route to London, crashed into a medical college hostel complex shortly after take-off from the Sardar Vallabhbhai Patel International Airport here on 12 June 2025.

The aircraft burst into flames, killing 241 out of the 242 people aboard and 19 individuals on the ground.

Around 30 bereaved families from Gujarat met in Ahmedabad on Saturday, and wrote a letter to the PM, requesting the release of the CVR and 'black box' (Flight Data Recorder) data.

Ten months after the AI crash, bereaved families have written to Prime Minister Modi, demanding the release of the CVR and black box data—*PTI*

The letter, copies of which were sent to the AAIB, the DGCA and Gujarat Chief Minister Bhupendra Patel, stated that if the black box data cannot be made public, it should at least be shared with the victims' families, privately.

"My home feels empty now," said Nilesh Purohit, who lost his 24-year-old son in the crash. "No amount of compensation can fill this void. We just want to know what happened," he said.

Kinjal Patel from Vasad, who lost her mother, described the difficulty of using the website created by Air India recently to help families recover victims' belongings.

"There are over 25,000 items listed, but the images are unclear. It's almost impossible to find anything," she said.

Others voiced concerns over the lack of accessible communication channels. Romin Vora from Kheda, who lost his mother, brother, and daughter, spoke about the struggles faced by families unfamiliar with digital tools.

"There is only one email ID, and responses take up to 15 days. Many villagers don't even know how to use email," he said. — *PTI*

UAV crashes during test flight

ETAWAH, 5 APRIL

An unmanned aerial vehicle (UAV) prototype of aviation start up LAT Aerospace crashed into a field near a village here after it lost control during a test flight from the Safai airstrip, officials said.

The incident occurred on Friday evening after the company, with prior permission from the Civil Aviation Department, was conducting a test of its UAV prototype at the Saifai airstrip.

During the test, the aerial vehicle developed a mechanical snag, went out of control and crashed into a field near Nandpur village, they said.

Locals rushed to the spot after spotting the aircraft lying in the field and alerted the police. A police team reached the site promptly and secured the wreckage.

During the test, the UAV developed a snag, went out of control and crashed into a field near Nandpur village —*PTI*

Additional District Magistrate Abhinav Ranjan Srivastava said on Saturday that LAT Aerospace was granted approval to use the Saifai airstrip for testing its UAV prototype. In a post on X, LAT Aerospace said the crash occurred during a ground roll test and that it was caused by strong winds. — *PTI*

Bihar hooch tragedy toll rises to 9 as three more die

MOTIHARI, 5 APRIL

The toll in the hooch tragedy in Bihar's East Champaran district rose to nine on Sunday after three more people who had consumed illicit liquor died, officials said. The first death was reported on Thursday, they said.

A total of 15 people have been arrested in connection with the deaths in the Turkauliya and Raghunathpur areas of Motihari, District Magistrate Saurabh Jorwal said.

A case of murder has already been registered on the basis of complaints filed by the families of the deceased, police said.

Jorwal said one person is still in hospital and his condition is reported to be critical. — *PTI*

SPEEDY JUSTICE

Upgrading judicial infra essential, says CJI Kant

HYDERABAD, 5 APRIL

State governments across the political spectrum have accepted that strengthening judicial infrastructure is not something optional but essential, Chief Justice of India Surya Kant said on Sunday here.

Addressing a gathering after laying the foundation stone for Telangana High Court Zone II, which includes residential buildings for judges and the chief justice, Surya Kant said that when the judiciary and executive align, the Constitution comes alive.

"The momentum across the country gives me great confidence. In the last few months, I have had the privilege of laying foundation stones for court complexes in Uttar Pradesh, Himachal Pradesh, Andhra Pradesh, Assam, and now Telangana," he said.

After viewing the conceptual drawings and models on display, the CJI said the proposed 100-acre new High Court complex will be among the best in the country.

Surya Kant added that during his discussion with Chief Minister A Revanth Reddy, he was assured that the High Court complex, including residential and other infrastructure, would be completed within two years.

The Telangana government had earlier allotted 100 acres for the new High Court complex, which is planned in two phases, and accorded administrative sanction of Rs 2,583 crore for the construction.

The foundation stone for zone I of the Judicial Court Complex was laid on March 27, 2024, and construction is already underway. Zone I comprises the main court complex and office buildings, while Zone II will house residential bungalows, ancillary structures, and a central record room, spanning approximately 60 acres. — *PTI*

SC helps man with 'negative' credit score despite no default

The Supreme Court came to the rescue of a man whose credit score remained "negative" despite having no outstanding loans.

Justices JB Pardiwala and KV Viswanathan was hearing a plea filed by Uttarakhand resident Rajendra Singh Panwar, who submitted that he had an adverse CIBIL score from 2020 despite not having any loan or default.

In his petition, Panwar submitted that his credit profile showed a negative score which prevented him from availing loans.

Panwar contended that two other individuals with the same name had been issued the same PAN number and their payment defaults were appearing in his CIBIL records.

In an affidavit filed in the SC, the Punjab National Bank (PNB) informed that it had not reported any default against Panwar. —*PTI*

Retired judge celebrates daughter's divorce

MEERUT, 5 APRIL

A family in Uttar Pradesh's Meerut celebrated the divorce of their daughter.

Retired judge Gyanendra Kumar Sharma welcomed home his only child, daughter Pranita Vashistha with drums, garlands and sweets, sending out a strong message against stigma, after a family court granted her divorce on Saturday.

Her counsels Rajeev Giri and Naseeb Saifi, said Pranita had married an Army Major from Shahjahanpur on 19 December 2018.

However, the marriage soon ran into trouble, with allegations of continued mental, physical and emotional distress at her matrimonial home.

Despite the birth of a son, the situation did not improve, prompting Pranita to file for divorce in the Meerut family court. Principal Judge Shaktiputra Tomar granted the divorce on Saturday.

Soon after the court's decision, the family turned the moment into a celebration of a "new beginning."

As Pranita stepped out of the court premises, relatives danced to the beat of drums and escorted her home.

At home, Dr Sharma welcomed his daughter with garlands and distributed sweets.

- Soon after the court's decision, the family celebrated the "new beginning." As Pranita Vashistha stepped out of the court premises, her relatives danced to the beat of drums and escorted her home

The family wore black T-shirts emblazoned with the message "I Love My Daughter."

Pranita, a postgraduate in Psychology, is the finance director at Pranav Vashistha Judicial Academy in Tejgarhi. Her brother Pranav Vashistha died in an accident at Chandigarh in 2022. — *PTI*

Odisha makes e-KYC must for LPG

BHUBANESWAR, 5 APRIL

The Odisha government has made e-KYC mandatory for domestic consumers to avail LPG cylinders from distributors, Food Supply and Consumer Welfare Minister KC Patra said on Sunday.

The move will ensure that only genuine customers get LPG cylinders, he asserted.

"We have also stopped the illegal sale of 1 kg or 5 kg cooking gas cylinders in the open market," he said.

He said the Odisha government has taken strong action against those engaging in black marketing of gas cylinders.

Authorities seized 27 LPG cylinders in Dhenkanal district on Sunday, officials said. "After getting information about the illegal sale of LPG, we raided the agency and seized 27 cylinders. Appropriate legal action will be taken," said Bibudha Garanaik, the Sub-Collector of Dhenkanal. — *PTI*

MP lodge collapse kills three; NDRF continues rescue ops

ANUPPUR, 5 APRIL

The death toll from the collapse of a four-storey lodge in Madhya Pradesh's Anuppur district rose to three, as NDRF teams continued their rescue operation to free those trapped under the debris, police said on Sunday. 'Aggarwal Lodge,' located near the bus stand in Kotma town, collapsed at around 5.30 pm on Saturday, trapping several people.

An official said the death toll has now risen to two, and five others are injured, of whom two are critical.

The deceased are Hanuman Deen Yadav, 55, and Ramkripal Yadav, 50, Anuppur SP Moti Ur Rahman said.

He said that the rescue teams, including the NDRF, conducted an overnight operation, and a search is underway at the site.

The construction going on near the 10-year-old building is suspected to have caused its collapse, the SP said. — *PTI*

People voluntarily demolish mosque, madrasa in UP

SAMBHAL, 5 APRIL

The residents of Mubarakpur Band village in Sambhal district began demolishing a madrasa, a mosque and a primary school built illegally on encroached government land using a bulldozer on Sunday, officials said.

On Saturday, Haji Munawwar, the husband of the village sarpanch, requested Tehsildar Dhirendra Kumar Singh to provide machinery to carry out the demolition, saying manual labour alone was inadequate.

On Sunday, a bulldozer was deployed in the village, paid for by the villagers, to clear the structures, including the Ghausul Madrasa, a mosque and a primary school spread over three-and-a-half bighas of Gram Sabha land.

"It would take around 20 hours to clear the structures," Munawwar said.

"The tehsildar visited the village on Saturday, and we explained to him that demolishing the structures manually was not possible, as it would take a long time. So we requested him to provide an excavator, which arrived today. We will bear its cost," he added. Confirming that the structures were built after encroaching on Gram Sabha land, the tehsildar said, "The villagers took the initiative to demolish the structures after realising that they were built on government land. They had requested our support to expedite the process." — *PTI*

INSPECTOR ACCUSED OF BRIBERY

Cop suspended for 'involvement' in Andhra honour killing

MACHERLA, 5 APRIL

A police inspector was suspended on Sunday over his alleged involvement in the alleged honour killing of a woman in a village in Macherla in Palnadu district, a senior police official said.

Police said the woman, identified as Chowdeshwaramma, was in a relationship with one Nagaraj, both belonging to the same community, and had eloped earlier.

"A police inspector was suspended following allegations of involvement in an honour killing case, including suspected monetary transactions with the victim's family," the official said.

Police said the couple had approached the police after eloping, where the woman's parents assured that they would conduct her marriage with Nagaraj, and she returned home. However, after a few days, when the family allegedly did not show interest in conducting the marriage, the woman expressed her intention to go back to the man again, he said.

Subsequently, she was found dead, with the family initially claiming that she had committed suicide and filed a complaint accordingly. But the autopsy report said the woman was strangled, contradicting the family's claim, police said.

Allegations later surfaced that the inspector had taken money from the woman's father and was involved in handing her back to the family earlier.

Based on these allegations and the failure to take proper action in the case, the inspector was suspended, said the official. The woman reportedly died on 18 March, the police said. — *PTI*

Regulate outsiders' role in tourism: Ladakhis

LEH, 5 APRIL

Ahead of the tourism season, stakeholders of Ladakh's tourism sector and civil society groups adopted a resolution voicing concern over the increasing entry of outside investors and steps to protect the region's ecosystem.

The resolution, adopted at a joint meeting of the Ladakh Travel Trade Alliance and civil society groups here on Saturday, emphasised that the tourism sector should remain reserved for local stakeholders to ensure ownership and decision-making remain within the community.

The Ladakh unit of the Congress also backed the two-page resolution, which called for preserving the region as a unique tourist destination, with development aligned with its ecological limits and cultural heritage.

The resolution said Ladakh lies deep in the Himalayas and for centuries remained geographically isolated.

"Ladakh has an extremely fragile ecosystem, marked by harsh winters and a short working season. After the opening up of Ladakh in 1974, the region has witnessed a growth in visitors, making tourism the backbone of the local economy. Today, tourism serves as the primary source of livelihood for most people," the resolution said.

"However, there has been pressure from large businesses trying to enter the tourism sector in Ladakh," the resolution said. The resolution said the meeting unanimously resolved to safeguard Ladakh's identity, protect its ecosystem, and protect the livelihoods of its people. — PTI

BUILT TO BREAK

A pontoon bridge connecting Vindhyachal Dham in Uttar Pradesh's Mirzapur district collapsed barely 15 days after being inaugurated by BJP MLA Ratnakar Mishra —*SCREENGRAB*

Will Suvendu takeover Didi's Bhabanipur fortress?

In the calculus of West Bengal's electoral politics, Bhabanipur has emerged as the X factor. Chief Minister Mamata Banerjee is pitted in a pitched battle with the BJP's Suvendu Adhikari in her long-held bastion, making it the state's most closely watched Assembly seat.

While the Trinamool Congress (TMC) is looking to retain its stronghold in south Kolkata with organisational strength and emotion, the BJP wants to breach the keep by banking on social arithmetic and symbolism.

The fight is reminiscent of the electoral clash between Banerjee and Adhikari in the 2021 Assembly polls, when the CM had taken on her protege-turned-rival, who had then just joined the BJP, in the latter's home turf, Nandigram.

Banerjee had lost the fight, although the BJP had been drubbed by the TMC five years ago. She later won the Bhabanipur Assembly bypolls.

The turf has changed, and it remains to be seen if the result does too.

Mamata Banerjee's party is banking on the "'ghorer meye' (girl next door)" pitch, organisational muscle and continuity. On the other hand, the BJP is looking to wrest the CM's "safest" seat with caste calculations, Ram Navami imagery and booth-level social engineering.

The TMC has revived the emotional cadence of "Bangla Nijer Meyekei Chay (Bengal wants its own daughter)" from its 2021 assembly polls playbook in a more localised form.

At a strategy meeting chaired by state TMC president Subrata Bakshi, councillors were instructed to push the slogan: 'Banglar unnayan ghore ghore, ghorer meye Bhabanipure'.

The message is simple: Bhabanipur is not merely electing a CM; it is standing by its own daughter.

Councillors have been told to go door-to-door, avoid confrontation and distribute leaflets highlighting Banerjee's development work.

WB Chief Minister Mamata Banerjee; BJP's Suvendu Adhikari —*PTI*

The TMC has also set up 'photo corners' across the constituency, where people can pose with life-size cutouts of Mamata.

For the TMC, however, it is more than a gimmick. It is an attempt to portray Banerjee not as a CM, but a familiar neighbourhood figure.

Despite the TMC's confidence, the BJP believes the ground has shifted. Bhabanipur has long been a "mini-India" of sorts, comprising Bengali bhadralok neighbourhoods, Marwari and Gujarati traders, Sikh and Jain families and a sizeable Muslim electorate.

Roughly 42 per cent of voters are Bengali Hindus, 34 per cent non-Bengali Hindus and around 24 per cent Muslims.

It is this social arithmetic that appears to have encouraged Adhikari to challenge Banerjee on her home turf.

For months, the BJP has quietly mapped Bhabanipur booth by booth and community by community.

Party leaders claim Kayasthas make up 26.2 per cent of the electorate, Muslims 24.5 per cent, eastern Indian migrant communities 14.9 per cent, Marwaris 10.4 per cent and Brahmins 7.6 per cent.

The survey identified where Bengali Hindus dominate, where Hindi-speaking traders are concentrated and which booths are likely to be influenced by Muslim voters.

That explains Adhikari attending the recent Ram Navami procession that traversed through Bhabanipur, culminating at Hazra crossing, near Banerjee's residence.

Political observers say the BJP is trying to consolidate Hindu votes, cutting across Bengali and non-Bengali communities, and simultaneously putting Banerjee on the defensive over minority politics.

The special intensive revision of electoral rolls has added another layer to the contest.

Nearly 47,000 names in Bhabanipur have reportedly been deleted from the voters' list. It is roughly 11,000 fewer than the over 58,000-vote margin secured by Banerjee in the 2021 bypoll. Another 14,000 remain under adjudication.

More than 56 per cent of those under scrutiny are Muslims, although the community forms only around 24 per cent of the electorate.

The BJP believes that if minority votes shrink even marginally while Hindu votes consolidate behind it, Bhabanipur could become a far tighter contest.

The TMC sees the same exercise as disproportionately affecting minority voters and traditional supporters.

That is why Firhad Hakim, Bakshi and other senior leaders are personally supervising Bhabanipur, while Abhishek Banerjee has reportedly set a target of ensuring Mamata Banerjee wins by at least 60,000 votes.

The BJP had shown signs of growth in Bhabanipur in the 2014 and 2019 Lok Sabha elections and even won Mamata Banerjee's own Kolkata Municipal Corporation Ward number 73 in 2014.

The trend sharpened in the 2024 Lok Sabha polls, when the TMC's lead in the Bhabanipur assembly segment fell to just 8,297 votes, against Banerjee's margin of 58,832 in the 2021 bypoll.

Significantly, the BJP finished ahead in five of the constituency's eight wards while the TMC led in only three.

For the BJP, the numbers suggest Bhabanipur is no longer impregnable. For the TMC, they are a reminder that Mamata Banerjee's safest seat may now need its fiercest defence. —*PTI*

SALAR

Displaced Lebanese mark Easter far from homes

It was not how the Reverend Maroun Ghafari had envisioned this Holy Week — for years, he had held Easter sermons in his predominantly Christian village of Alma al-Shaab in southern Lebanon, near the border with Israel.

This year, he is preaching from a Beirut suburb, beside a cardboard cutout depicting his church in Alma al-Shaab, now caught in the crossfire between Israeli forces and Hezbollah fighters.

Since hostilities erupted last month between Israel and Lebanon's Iran-backed Hezbollah militant group — in the shadow of the wider, US-Israeli war on Iran — over 1,400 people have been killed in Lebanon, and more than 1 million have been forced to flee their homes.

Among those displaced from the war-torn south are thousands of Christians. They now find themselves far from their ancestral churches in Lebanon, where Christians have maintained a strong presence through centuries of Byzantine, Arab and Ottoman conquest and plenty of modern-day crises.

Christians are estimated to make up around a third of Lebanon's population of roughly 5.5 million people. With 12 Christian sects, the country is home to the largest proportion of Christians of any nation in the Arab world.

HUDDLING IN A CHURCH, HOPING FOR PROTECTION

Christian villagers who stayed behind in southern Lebanon, ignoring Israel's blanket evacuation warnings for the area, have increasingly hardened into enclaves surrounded by fierce clashes.

And though villagers in Alma al-Shaab had been uprooted before, in the 2024 Israel-Hezbollah war, this time around, they were adamant they wouldn't leave, even as airstrikes came closer and closer.

The villagers huddled in their church for protection as Israeli warplanes pounded large swaths of southern and eastern Lebanon, while Israeli troops stepped up a ground invasion and Hezbollah kept firing rockets at Israel.

In his annual Easter homily, Patriarch Beshara al-Rai of Lebanon's Maronite Church blamed both Hezbollah and Israel for the suffering wrought by the war.

"The country is going through a critical situation due to Iranian interference through Hezbollah and Israeli aggression," he said. "Our hearts bleed for the victims of the conflict imposed on Lebanon." Maroun's brother, 70-year-old Sami Ghafari, was among the villagers who sought refuge at the church in Alma al-Shaab.

But he dashed out briefly on 8 March to tend to his garden, and was killed by an Israeli drone strike. His killing prompted the remaining villagers — including his brother — to pack up their belongings.

The UN peacekeepers in the area — a force known as UNIFIL that has monitored the region for nearly five decades — evacuated them to the northern suburbs of Beirut.

"We wanted to stay, but it was always possible that one of us could be targeted or killed at any moment," the Reverend Maroun told The Associated Press from St Anthony Church in the northern Beirut suburb of Jdeideh, where the displaced from Alma al-Shaab came to worship on Saturday.

'MISSING THE SMELL OF HOME'

For many Lebanese Christians, it's a tradition on Holy Saturday — the day between Good Friday, which commemorates the crucifixion and death of Jesus, and Easter Sunday, which marks his resurrection according to the Gospels — to visit the graves of their loved ones.

This year, displaced Christians could only reflect from afar.

Nabila Farah, dressed in black for the Saturday service at St Anthony Church, was among the last to leave Alma al-Shaab. She still feels heartbroken, a month later.

Those who remain face other challenges.

Marius Khairallah, a priest in the southern Lebanese city of Tyre, where much of the Christian community has hunkered down, says that he and his congregants are staying put "not out of stubbornness, but out of a sense of mission, to remain alongside their fellow faithful, as witnesses."

Worries are mounting among Christians in the area as the Lebanese army — which seeks to stay neutral in the Israel-Hezbollah war — pulls out from parts of southern Lebanon, leaving them exposed to Israeli forces pushing deeper into the territory.

St Antony's main priest, the Reverend Dori Fayyad, used his Good Friday sermon to take solemn note of the war's widening toll on the southern Lebanese Christians, as the faithful recited prayers in Arabic and Syriac, a dialect of the Aramaic language spoken by Jesus.

"Today, you understand what the cross means, not as an idea, not as a concept, but because you are going through it," he told the fully packed pews, the crowd so thick that dozens had to stand or crouch on the back stairs. Some wiped away tears as Fayyad named one by one the southern churches, illustrated in the cardboard cutouts next to the pulpit. —*PTI*

Since hostilities erupted last month between Israel and Lebanon's Iran-backed Hezbollah militant group over 1,400 people have been killed in Lebanon, and more than 1 million have been forced to flee —*PTI*

LETTERS

write to us at salarenglishdigital@gmail.com

Pam Bondi's extreme loyalty to Trump wasn't enough to save her job

After US President Donald Trump fired Attorney General Pam Bondi on 2 April, 2026, news reports suggested that she fell from grace, not for being too independent, but for not being effective enough at defending him and prosecuting his political enemies.

As The New York Times reported the previous day, Trump was disappointed with "Bondi's handling of the Jeffrey Epstein files, which has become a political liability for Trump among his supporters. He has also complained about her shortcomings as a communicator and vented about what he sees as the Department of Justice's lack of aggressiveness in going after his foes."

The President has long indicated that whoever served as attorney general in his administration should see themselves as his lawyer rather than as someone representing the US government.

During his first presidential term, Trump was gravely disappointed with Jeff Sessions, his first attorney general, who recused himself from the investigation into alleged political interference in the 2016 election.

He replaced Sessions with William Barr, who abandoned Trump when the President did not accept the results of the 2020 election.

Having learned from those mistakes, Trump set out to find a political ally and loyalist to take the helm at the Justice Department in his second administration.

As a scholar of law and politics and someone who has written about the role of the attorney general, I think Trump's desire has a familiar ring to it.

It is not unusual for presidents to put people who share their views and policy preferences into the role. But Trump has gone far beyond what is usually done.

BONDI'S ASCENT

Florida Congressman Matt Gaetz was Trump's first choice for attorney general during the president's second term.

Some criticised him for calling the president an "inspirational leader of a loving and patriotic movement" in the aftermath of the 6 January, 2021, attack on the Capitol.

In the face of growing opposition generated in part by allegations of his misconduct, Gaetz withdrew.

Trump turned to Bondi a few hours later.

In addition, as PBS noted at the time of her appointment, Bondi was "a longtime Trump ally and was one of his lawyers during his first impeachment trial, when he was accused — but not convicted — of abusing his power as he tried to condition US military assistance to Ukraine on that country investigating then-former vice president Joe Biden."

US President Donald Trump was reportedly frustrated with how Attorney General Pam Bondi had handled the release of the Epstein files, first promising full disclosure & then botching its rollout —*INSTAGARAM/@WHITEHOUSE*

She also showed her loyalty by attending Trump's New York trial for paying hush money to porn actor Stormy Daniels, with whom he allegedly had an affair.

At the time of her nomination, Bondi seemed to have the attributes of an attorney general.

FROM CONFIRMATION TO DOWNFALL

During her confirmation hearings, Bondi promised to safeguard the Justice Department's independence and bolster its transparency. She also vowed to not serve as the president's personal attorney.

And in response to a question from Rhode Island Senator Sheldon Whitehouse, she pledged in January 2025 that "there will never be an enemies list within the Department of Justice."

But she also showed her willingness to joust with Democrats on the Senate Judiciary Committee. She hewed to the MAGA script by refusing to say that the president had lost the 2020 election.

And she mounted a spirited attack on the Biden Justice Department, which she claimed had been "weaponised for years and years and years."

Once in office, Bondi took on the difficult task of leading the Justice Department while also pleasing the president. She stood by when Trump used an appearance at the department to give, according to The New York Times, a "grievance-filled attack on the very people who have worked in the building and others like them."

Bondi apparently did not do enough to deliver on that version of justice.

Last year, Trump had to urge Bondi to take action against his political enemies, including former FBI Director James Comey, California Senator Adam Schiff and New York Attorney General Leticia James. Bondi took her marching orders and launched investigations of those the President named. However, she was not able to secure any convictions.

If that wasn't enough, Trump was also reportedly frustrated with the way Bondi had handled the release of the Epstein files, first promising full disclosure and then botching the rollout of the files.

CONTENDING VISIONS OF THE ATTORNEY GENERAL'S JOB

Bondi's tenure illustrates the conflicting visions of what an attorney general should do that animate today's American politics.

The questions Democrats asked her during her confirmation were designed to get her to commit to their view of what the attorney general should do. Those questions signalled their belief that anyone occupying that office should maintain their distance from the president and uphold the Justice Department's independence.

It's common for presidents to appoint their friends and supporters to be attorneys general. But even compared with this history, Trump and his allies have a radically different vision, seeing the attorney general as just another Cabinet member whose responsibility is to carry out the president's policies and implement his directions.

In the end, it seems that Bondi was fired for her failure to be effective in the political role assigned to her.

The president will likely want to replace her with someone even more political than she was, who promises to deliver more of the results he wants. —*PTI*

— PTI

Seven infants die in Pak's first Mpox outbreak

KARACHI, 5 APRIL

Seven infants, four of whom tested positive for Mpox, have died in south-eastern Pakistan, marking the country's first local outbreak of the viral disease. The cases emerged in Sindh's Khairpur town, with initial blood tests confirming Mpox in four infants. The infants died in two Khairpur hospitals after being admitted for lesions, flu-like symptoms, and fever. The virus spreads through close contact with humans or animals. The health department noted the deaths were not directly caused by Mpox but said the children were premature, weak, and suffering from malnutrition. To prevent further spread, neonatal units at Khairpur have been temporarily closed. —*PTI*

Pope Leo celebrates 1st Easter with message of hope

VATICAN CITY, 5 APRIL

Pope Leo marked his first Easter Mass as pontiff with a call for hope amidst global conflicts. Addressing worldwide violence, including US-Iran tensions and Russia's Ukraine campaign, he urged believers to hold onto hope against injustice, war, and greed. The open-air Mass in St. Peter's Square featured white roses and spring flowers, symbolising renewal. The pope warned against indifference to injustice, emphasising that darkness gives way to new life and fruit. He quoted Pope Francis, urging care for the vulnerable and rejection of cruelty. Later, he will deliver his traditional "Urbi et Orbi" message. Christians in the Holy Land observed a subdued Easter due to restrictions amid ongoing conflicts, with authorities limiting gatherings at the Church of the Holy Sepulchre. —*PTI*

Italy PM Meloni praises arrest of top crime fugitive

ROME, 5 APRIL

Italian Prime Minister Giorgia Meloni congratulated police on the arrest of Roberto Mazzarella, one of Italy's most wanted fugitives. Mazzarella, 48, was captured following a raid on a villa on the Amalfi Coast, where he allegedly used false documents to rent the property. Meloni described the arrest as an "important blow against the Camorra," Italy's notorious criminal organisation, and said, "This sends a clear message that the state will not back down." Mazzarella is wanted over a 2000 fatal shooting at a delicatessen in Naples. The authorities' success highlights ongoing efforts against organised crime, with Meloni's government emphasising law enforcement's commitment to tackling mafia-related activities.—*PTI*

Oxford marks bicentenary of sacred Hindu text

LONDON, 5 APRIL

Oxford University's Bodleian Libraries has launched a UK-wide tour celebrating the bicentenary of the 'Shikshapatri', a sacred Hindu scripture. The manuscript, composed in Gujarat in 1826 by Sahajananda Swami, is a guide to ethical and spiritual living. The tour aims to reach 20,000-30,000 people across major temples, with the aim of honouring its cultural significance and message. Dr Gillian Evison stated that the 'Shikshapatri' promotes compassion, non-violence, and social harmony, principles still relevant today. The manuscript was personally presented to Sir John Malcolm in 1830. The tour will visit Swaminarayan temples in London and Wales until August, offering a rare opportunity for community engagement with this historic text. —*PTI*

US feels pinch of Iran war as prices soar

Gas, transport prices rise as petrol sees highest hike since 2022 as experts warn of inflation

WASHINGTON, 5 APRIL

The war against Iran is beginning to strain the US economy, with rising fuel costs pushing up transport and delivery charges nationwide.

Amazon has announced a 3.5 per cent fuel surcharge on third-party sellers from 17 April, citing higher logistics costs. Similarly, the United States Postal Service is seeking approval to impose a temporary 8 per cent surcharge on package and express deliveries from 26 April until January 2027.

Fuel prices have climbed sharply. Petrol reached an average of $4.09 per gallon on Friday, over a dollar higher than pre-war levels and the highest since August 2022. Diesel prices have surged from $3.64 a year ago to $5.53, according to the American Automobile Association. Diesel is critical to sectors including farming, construction and freight.

The disruption is linked to instability around the Strait of Hormuz, a vital global oil route. Analysts at JPMorgan warn that blocked shipments have already removed hundreds of millions of barrels from global supply.

Economist Austan Goolsbee cautioned that rising transport costs will feed into broader inflation, worsening cost-of-living pressures.

Asia has already begun rationing fuel, while Europe may face shortages by mid-April. The US, due to longer shipping times, is expected to feel the full impact later, possibly by late April or May, when supply constraints could emerge, particularly in California.

Analysts warn prolonged conflict could further disrupt supply chains and deepen economic strain. —*PTI*

> **Battle-tested generals refuse to be yes-men for a TV host selling out American lives for Israel's delusions. That's the short-term price. Long-term cost? American taxpayers paying at the pump for decades. Real LEGACY**
>
> -MB Ghalibaf, Iran's Parliament Speaker

Amazon has announced a 3.5 per cent fuel surcharge on third-party sellers from 17 April, citing higher logistics costs —*PTI*

Many of Iran's military leaders killed in massive strikes: Don

NEW DELHI, 5 APRIL

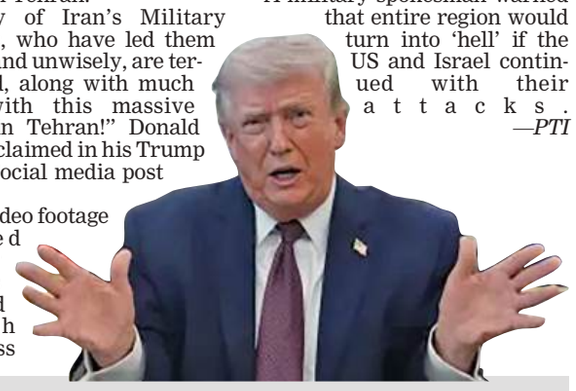
The US President Donald Trump has claimed that massive strikes in Iran capital Tehran have been carried out in which many of Iran's military leaders were reportedly killed.

Sharing a video of the strikes on social media, Trump said that many of Iran's military leaders who have led them poorly and unwisely have been eliminated in a massive air strike in Tehran.

"Many of Iran's Military Leaders, who have led them poorly and unwisely, are terminated, along with much else, with this massive strike in Tehran!" Donald Trump claimed in his Trump Truth Social media post on X.

The video footage showed air strikes amid pitch darkness illumining the night sky following series of explosions and noise of aircraft flying past the sky invisible.

There were no further details of these strikes provided by the US President's post. These air strikes followed Trump's earlier warning that "all hell would rain down on" Iran if it failed to reached an agreement. Iran's strong response to Trump's warning, however, indicated no signs of any immediate de-escalation by it. A military spokesman warned that entire region would turn into 'hell' if the US and Israel continued with their attacks. —*PTI*



US rebuts rumours of Trump's hospitalisation

White House dismissed social media rumours claiming Donald Trump had been hospitalised ahead of Easter. Reports suggested the 79-year-old was taken to Walter Reed Medical Center. Communications director Steven Cheung denied the claims, saying Trump had been working "nonstop" from the Oval Office. The White House also criticised "conspiracy theories" in a post on its Rapid Response account.

Iran war hindering delivery of aids to millions: Aid groups

Aid groups are warning that the war in the Middle East has upended their ability to get food and medicine to millions of people around the world in need, and that the suffering will deepen if the violence continues. The World Food Program says it has tens of thousands of metric tons of food heavily delayed in transit. The International Rescue Committee has USD 130,000 worth of pharmaceuticals intended for war-torn Sudan stranded in Dubai and nearly 670 boxes of therapeutic food meant for severely malnourished children in Somalia stuck in India. Jean-Cedric Meeus, chief of global transport and logistics for UNICEF, said his agency is using a mix of land and air routes to send vaccines to Nigeria and Iran in order to get them there in time.—*PTI*

Drones target key energy infra in Gulf

DUBAI/ KUWAIT CITY, 5 APRIL

Drone attacks attributed to Iran caused significant damage across Kuwait on Sunday, hitting two power plants and a water desalination facility, according to the Electricity Ministry. Two power generation units were taken out of service, though no injuries were reported.

Separately, the Finance Ministry confirmed "significant damage" to its office complex in Kuwait City following another drone strike, again with no casualties.

BAHRAIN

In neighbouring Bahrain, state oil firm BAPCO Energies said a drone strike ignited a fire at a storage facility. The blaze was quickly contained by emergency teams, and no injuries were reported. Damage assessments are ongoing.

Israeli forces carried out airstrikes on the southern port city of Tyre in Lebanon, hitting around 140 Hezbollah locations —*PTI*

UAE

Authorities in the United Arab Emirates responded to multiple fires at the Borouge petrochemicals plant in Ruwais, near the Saudi border. The facility, a joint venture between Abu Dhabi National Oil Company and Borealis, halted production after debris from intercepted aerial threats sparked the fires.

ISRAEL–IRAN STRIKES

The escalation follows intensified strikes by the Israel Defence Forces, which said it hit over 200 targets in Iran and 140 Hezbollah sites in Lebanon, including missile facilities and command centres linked to the Islamic Revolutionary Guard Corps. Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu claimed the offensive has severely weakened Iran.

GLOBAL FALLOUT

Iran reported executing two men over alleged involvement in January protests amid a wider crackdown that left thousands dead or detained. The conflict, which began with US–Israel strikes on 28 February, has disrupted shipping routes, driven up fuel prices and raised concerns over civilian targeting and possible war crimes.

ARGENTINA

Argentina expelled Iran's top diplomat after designating the IRGC a terrorist organisation, escalating diplomatic tensions further. —*PTI*

Iran flags radioactive leak as N-plant hit

TEHRAN, 5 APRIL

Iranian Foreign Minister Abbas Araghchi has written to Antonio Guterres condemning US–Israeli strikes on Iran's nuclear infrastructure, including near the Bushehr Nuclear Power Plant, warning of potential radioactive contamination across the region.

In the letter, shared via Telegram, Araghchi cautioned that attacks near active nuclear facilities pose "serious human and environmental consequences" and expose the region to major risk.

Rafael Mariano Grossi of the International Atomic Energy Agency also voiced "deep concern", though confirmed no rise in radiation levels so far.

Iran's Tasnim news agency reported that while the main plant remains intact, an auxiliary building was damaged, with energy production unaffected. However, a security personnel member was killed in the incident.

Abbas Araghchi

Separately, Tedros Adhanom Ghebreyesus of the World Health Organisation warned that any strike on nuclear facilities could trigger a catastrophic accident with long-term health consequences. —*Agencies*

US strips late Iranian leader's niece of residency

US Secretary of State Marco Rubio has revoked the permanent residency of Qassem Soleimani's niece, Hamideh Soleimani Afshar, and her daughter, for being "an outspoken supporter of the totalitarian, terrorist regime in Iran". The US said that such speech would not be tolerated under US President Donald Trump. Qassem was the commander of Iran's Quds Force— the foreign branch of IRGC, assassinated in 2020. The two women were arrested on Friday.

US' most lethal missiles poised to strike Iran

Two-thirds of US's stockpile is committed to the Iran war. In March, it was announced that the next steps in the US military campaign against Iran will be to commit nearly its entire inventory of stealthy JASSM-ER cruise missiles, drawing them from stockpiles devoted to other regions. After the moves, only about 425 JASSM-ER out of a prewar inventory of 2,300 will remain available for the rest of the globe. The JASSM-ER, or Joint Air-to-Surface Missile-Extended Range, can fly more than 600 miles and was designed to hit targets at a safer distance to avoid an enemy's air defences.

Zelenskyy fears Ukraine will lose aid amid Iran war

Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelenskyy fears a prolonged US-Israeli conflict with Iran will erode support for Ukraine. Shifting Washington priorities threaten to reduce critical Patriot missile deliveries needed by Ukraine to counter Russia, Zelenskyy said on Saturday in Istanbul. "We have to recognise that we are not the priority for today," Zelenskyy said. The latest US-mediated talks in February between Moscow and Kyiv ended with no breakthrough.

45, INCLUDING 23 CHILDREN, DEAD IN PAK AMID RAINS

ISLAMABAD, 5 APRIL

At least 45 persons have lost their lives and 105 sustained injuries in rain-related incidents across Khyber Pakhtunkhwa province in northwest Pakistan over the last 10 days, the PDMA said Sunday.

In a report that covers damages caused by persistent rains since 25 March, the Provincial Disaster Management Authority (PDMA) said that among the total 45 fatalities, 23 are children, 17 men and 5 women while the injured comprised 45 men, 16 women, and 44 children.

The heavy rainfall resulted in roof and wall collapses in multiple districts of the province, the PDMA report said, highlighting the widespread human and material losses across the province.

At least 442 houses have been affected, of which 382 were partially damaged and 60 were completely destroyed in over two dozen districts.

The PDMA report further stated that rescue and relief operations are ongoing, with PDMA, Rescue 1122, district administrations, and other relevant agencies working in close coordination.

Meanwhile, the PDMA Director General has warned that a fresh spell of rain is expected till 9 April. —*PTI*

TO BREAK APOLLO 13 RECORD

Artemis crew more than halfway to moon

HOUSTON, 5 APRIL

Astronauts aboard Artemis II are more than halfway to the Moon, preparing for a historic fly-around that will take them farther than any human spaceflight since the Apollo era.

The mission marks the first crewed journey towards the Moon in over 53 years, continuing the legacy of Apollo programme.

The four-member crew — Victor Glover, Reid Wiseman, Christina Koch and Jeremy Hansen — are set to loop around the lunar far side on Monday, capturing images before returning to Earth.

Despite the milestone, a malfunctioning toilet aboard the Orion capsule has posed minor challenges.

Engineers believe ice may be blocking part of the waste system, forcing astronauts to rely on backup urine collection bags. The issue has also caused odour concerns, though officials say the crew is managing well.

The spacecraft is expected to travel over 4,00,000km from Earth, surpassing the distance record set by Apollo 13.

The nearly 10-day mission will conclude with a Pacific splashdown on 10 April.

The mission is notable for several firsts: Koch becomes the first woman and Glover the first Black astronaut to travel to the Moon, while Hansen is the first non-American to join a lunar mission, representing the Canadian Space Agency.

NASA views Artemis II as a key step towards establishing a sustained human presence on the Moon, with a targeted landing near the lunar south pole by 2028. —*PTI*

Artemis II crew Canadian astronaut Jeremy Hansen, Commander Reid Wiseman, mission specialist Christina Koch and pilot Victor Glover speak with NASA Mission Control via video conference from the moon's —*PTI*

The mission marks the first crewed journey towards the Moon in over 53 years, continuing the legacy of Apollo programme—*PTI*

WH ballroom project halt poses security risk: US

WASHINGTON, 5 APRIL

Donald Trump's administration is arguing that a judge's order to halt construction of a $400 million White House ballroom creates a security risk for the US president as his team asks a federal appeals court to pause the ruling.

In a motion filed on Friday, US National Park Service lawyers say that the federal judge's order to suspend construction of the new facility is "threatening grave national-security harms to the White House, the president and his family, and the president's staff". "Time is of the essence!" the lawyers write, citing materials that will be installed to make a "heavily fortified" facility.

The ballroom construction also includes bomb shelters, military installations and a medical facility, according to the filing. —*Agencies*

CIL to allow foreign buyers to bid online

NEW DELHI, 5 APRIL

State-owned Coal India Ltd (CIL) announced that it will now allow buyers from Bangladesh, Bhutan, and Nepal to bid in online coal auctions directly. The move, the company had said, will help utilise surplus coal resources more effectively and promote transparency. Earlier, consumers across borders had access to CIL's dry fuel only through domestic coal traders, who were allowed to sell without any end-use restrictions. "In a first, effective 1 January 2026... Bangladesh, Bhutan and Nepal, who wish to import coal from India, to directly participate in the Single Window Mode Agnostic auctions by the company," CIL had said. "Opening e-auctions to foreign buyers will boost market expansion while fully safeguarding domestic coal requirements —*PTI*

CIL plans to e-auction 25.62 MT of coal in April

NEW DELHI, 5 APRIL

State-owned Coal India Ltd (CIL) plans to offer 25.62 million tonnes of coal via online auction this month, a move expected to mitigate the impact of energy supply shock amid the West Asia crisis. The disruptions in LNG, LPG and crude oil supplies from West Asia have increased demand for coal, driving up its import prices. CIL had offered 32.532 million tonnes of coal through e-auction in March against 20.5 million tonnes in February this year. CIL accounts for over 80 per cent of domestic coal production. Coal India's FY26 production hit 768.1 MT, a 1.7 per cent drop from FY25's 781.1 MT. Monthly output for March fell to 84.5 MT from 85.8 MT —*PTI*

Iran war caps housing price rise: Anarock

NEW DELHI, 5 APRIL

India's top seven housing markets saw a muted 2 per cent rise in average prices during January-March. Contrasting the previous quarter, where sales fell amid negative consumer sentiments caused by the West Asia conflict. Real estate consultant Anarock data showed that the average housing prices across seven major cities rose to Rs 9,456 per square feet in January-March from Rs 9,260 per square feet in the preceding quarter. On an annual basis, the prices rose 7 per cent from Rs 8,868 per square feet in January-March 2025. Anarock tracks primary (first sale) housing markets of seven cities — Mumbai, Delhi-NCR, Bengaluru, Pune, Hyderabad, Chennai and Kolkata. However, the outlook for India's housing market remains positive.—*PTI*

Energy mix needed to meet power demand: Govt

JAIPUR, 5 APRIL

Union Power Secretary Pankaj Agarwal on Saturday advocated for an 'energy mix' to meet long-term demand, urging Rajasthan utilities to expedite projects combining renewable and conventional sources. During a review meeting with Rajasthan's energy department and power companies, Agarwal said bundling renewable and non-renewable energy sources would help manage the rising electricity demand more efficiently. He noted that decentralised solar projects under the PM-KUSUM Scheme have gained momentum in Rajasthan, but also flagged challenges related to the grid integration of solar power. Agarwal emphasised the need to strengthen grid stability and to develop battery energy storage systems in a timely manner to ensure an uninterrupted power supply during peak hours, as per an official statement —*PTI*

Moody's cuts India's FY27 GDP growth forecast to 6%

Warns of inflation and hike in fuel cost due to West Asia war

NEW DELHI, 5 APRIL

Moody's Ratings has slashed India's economic growth estimates for the current fiscal to 6 per cent from 6.8 per cent earlier, saying the West Asia conflict will moderate growth momentum.

In its credit opinion report on India, Moody's said prolonged disruptions, particularly LPG shipments, would lead to near-term household shortages, higher fuel and transport costs, and spillovers to food inflation through India's reliance on imported fertilisers.

The region accounts for around 55 per cent of crude oil imports and over 90 per cent of LPG supplies to India.

Moody's projected inflation to average 4.8 per cent in FY27.

Policy rates are likely to be held steady or raised gradually in fiscal 2026–27, depending on the duration of geopolitical tensions and their pass-through to food

The government's sustained emphasis on infrastructure spending and a gradual easing of trade barriers will continue to support investment activity.

India's real GDP growth remained robust at 7.5 per cent in calendar year 2025, the highest among G-20 economies, driven primarily by a strong rebound in manufacturing.

Moody's said elevated oil, gas and fertiliser prices would intensify pressures on targeted subsidies, resulting in higher outlays, alongside revenue erosion compared to the budget.

Global crude prices have risen by almost 50 per cent since the Iran war began.

The recent cut in excise duty on petrol and diesel will hurt tax receipts. Besides, persistently high input costs weigh on household consumption and compress corporate profitability, softening GST collections and corporate income tax revenues.

Moody's expects gradual debt consolidation, consistent with the government's medium-term objective of reducing central government debt to around 50 per cent of GDP by 2030-31.

The agency expects goods and services exports to remain broadly stable, even as goods imports will expand on the back of higher global commodity prices.

Trade disruptions affecting West Asia will also dampen external demand. —*PTI*

AT RS 60/LITRE

OMCs to pay discounted rates to refiners

NEW DELHI, 5 APRIL

Indian state-run oil marketing companies (OMCs) will pay refineries a discounted price for petrol, diesel, aviation turbine fuel (ATF) and kerosene to limit mounting losses from a self-imposed freeze on retail fuel prices.

The OMCs fixed rates for petroleum products at a discount of up to Rs 60 per litre to their imported cost.

International oil prices have risen from about USD 70 per barrel to over USD 100, but retail petrol and diesel prices in India have remained unchanged.

With no immediate end to the Iran war, OMCs have decided to fix a discount on the refinery transfer price to effectively pay refineries less than the import-parity cost of the fuels.

For the second half of March, a discount of Rs 22,342 per kilolitre (Rs 22.34 per litre) was fixed on diesel to bring down the RTP of Rs 85,349 per kl to Rs 63,007 per kl.

For the first fortnight of April, the discount on diesel has been fixed at Rs 60,239 per kl to lower RTP from Rs 146,243 per kl to Rs 86,004 per kl.

On ATF, the RTP has been slashed to Rs 76,923 per kl from Rs 127,486 per kl. The RTP for kerosene after a discount of Rs 46,311 per kl has been fixed at Rs 77,534 per kl.

The discounted pricing would prevent refiners from fully passing on higher crude costs through RTP.

Meanwhile, Oil India Ltd has significantly ramped up crude production from Rajasthan's Thar desert, achieving a record output of 1,202 barrels per day from the Jodhpur sandstone formation. It produced 705 barrels per day in 2025. —*PTI*

FPIs pull out Rs 19,837 cr from equities in April

NEW DELHI, 5 APRIL

Foreign investors continued to exit Indian equities, withdrawing Rs 19,837 crore (USD 2.1 billion) in the first two trading sessions of April, weighed down by the West Asia conflict, rising crude oil prices, and persistent rupee depreciation.

This came following a record withdrawal of Rs 1.17 lakh crore (about USD 12.7 billion) from domestic equities in March, making it the worst monthly outflow. Before this, FPIs pumped in Rs 22,615 crore in February, the highest monthly inflow in 17 months.

With the latest withdrawals, total Foreign Portfolio Investors (FPIs) outflow has reached Rs 1.5 lakh crore so far in 2026, according to NSDL data.

As per the data, FPIs continued to take out money in April, offloading equities worth Rs 19,837 crore in the cash market till 2 April.

Market participants attributed the sustained selling pressure to global macroeconomic headwinds and heightened geopolitical uncertainty.

Continuation of the war, crude spiking to above USD 100 level, steady decline in the rupee and appreciation of the dollar triggered this record selling by FPIs, market experts said.

Moreover, the rupee has depreciated by about 4 per cent since the Iran war and fears of further depreciation have added to its weakness rupee, that has triggered further selling by FPI. —*PTI*

TV INDUSTRY FACES SALES DROP ON STEEP PRODUCTION COST

NEW DELHI, 5 APRIL

The TV industry is preparing for a decline in sales due to rising production costs amid ongoing geopolitical tensions in West Asia. The industry is already grappling with soaring prices of memory chips (RAM), and now faces increased costs of plastics and ocean freight.

Some manufacturers are also warning of a downtrading trend as buyers shift towards smaller screens due to higher prices. Additionally, the depreciation of the rupee has pushed up overall production expenses, leading to higher retail prices.

Larger brands have absorbed some cost pressures, with some not passing on the full increase to maintain market share in India's competitive TV market. Consumers are delaying purchases, but some recovery is anticipated during the festive season later this year.

Avneet Singh Marwah, CEO of Super Plastronics Pvt Ltd, described the situation as "very difficult" with signs of "downtrading" emerging. He noted, "Consumers looking for a 55-inch TV might opt for a 50-inch model. —*PTI*

MARKET STAY VOLATILE

Mcap of top firms declines by Rs 65K cr; Airtel loses Rs 29,993

NEW DELHI, 5 APRIL

The combined market valuation of six of the top-10 most valued Indian companies fell by Rs 64,734.46 crore last week, amid ongoing market volatility.

Bharti Airtel recorded the steepest decline, losing Rs 29,993.07 crore to end at Rs 10,20,420.26 crore. ICICI Bank's valuation dropped by Rs 12,845.81 crore to Rs 8,70,705.49 crore, while Bajaj Finance lost Rs 11,169.36 crore, closing at Rs 5,14,226.12 crore.

HDFC Bank's market cap decreased by Rs 7,822.79 crore to Rs 11,56,195.90 crore, and Hindustan Unilever's valuation declined by Rs 2,349.59 crore to Rs 4,85,190.60 crore. State Bank of India's market cap shrank by Rs 553.84 crore to Rs 9,41,015.31 crore.

The week saw the Sensex fall by 263.67 points (0.35%), and the Nifty by 106.5 points (0.46%), marking the sixth consecutive week of decline. Market movements were driven by global tensions, rising crude prices, and domestic uncertainties.

The week began with weak sentiment due to US-Iran tensions, but markets recovered mid-week amid easing geopolitical concerns and softer oil prices. Despite the rebound, volatility persisted due to global cues, foreign outflows, rupee weakness, and inflation fears.

In contrast, Tata Consultancy Services rose Rs 22,359.78 crore to Rs 8,87,028.43 crore, Infosys increased by Rs 12,374.76 crore to Rs 5,27,409.43 crore, and Larsen & Toubro added Rs 6,575.43 crore to Rs 4,97,111.62 crore. Reliance Industries gained Rs 3,518.45 crore, maintaining its position as the most valuable firm at Rs 18,28,034.07 crore. —*PTI*

CII asks Finance Ministry for fiscal support

NEW DELHI, 5 APRIL

Industry lobby CII on Sunday outlined a 20-point agenda to mitigate the impact of the West Asia crisis, calling for measures including a temporary exemption from long-term capital gains tax for foreign investors in the primary market.

The introduction of a time-bound Conflict-Linked Emergency Credit Line Guarantee Scheme and a three-month moratorium and restructuring window for MSMEs.

It also stated that the Ministry of Finance may consider a temporary exemption from long-term capital gains tax for foreign investors in primary market investments, with the qualifying holding period extended from two to three years.

CII proposed that priority sector lending (PSL) norms may be revisited to enable banks to respond more flexibly to sector-specific stress during external disruptions.

It also suggested that the RBI could institute a Special Refinance Window for MSMEs and other affected sectors, among other measures, seeking their consideration by the government.

The finance ministry said the government is closely monitoring developments in the global geopolitics and stands ready to take further measures to support growth and stability while ensuring macroeconomic stability and protecting vulnerable sectors during ongoing global uncertainty and disruptions ahead. —*PTI*

IPO pipeline gains; 38 cos file drafts in March

NEW DELHI, 5 APRIL

As many as 38 companies, including SBI Funds Management and Manipal Health Enterprises, filed preliminary IPO papers with Sebi in March 2026, signalling improving issuer sentiment even as regulatory timelines contributed to the surge.

This marks a sharp jump from 22 filings in March 2025 and 16 in March 2024, data from the Securities and Exchange Board of India (Sebi) showed, indicating a stronger pipeline of public issues.

The momentum is expected to continue, with several high-profile companies, including the National Stock Exchange (NSE) and Reliance Industries' telecom arm Jio, preparing to submit their draft papers in the coming weeks, according to merchant banking sources.

In addition, Singapore-based Sembcorp Industries' Indian renewable energy arm and Sweden-based Modern Times Group's subsidiary PlaySimple are also likely to file DRHPs soon, they added.

Of the 38 companies that filed their draft papers with Sebi, a total of 9 firms, including Zetwerk, SNVA Traveltech, Rediff.com India have opted for the confidential filing route. —*PTI*

Meta halts work with Mercor post $10B security breach

NEW DELHI, 5 APRIL

Mark Zuckerberg-led Meta has reportedly paused all its work indefinitely with data contracting startup Mercor following a major security breach.

A report by WIRED said other major AI labs too were reevaluating their work with the Silicon Valley startup, which is in the midst of investigating the incident.

Mercor, a data contractor for major AI firms such as OpenAI and Anthropic, confirmed that it had been targeted in a security breach linked to a 'supply-chain' attack on the open-source tool LiteLLM, which is used by millions of developers to connect their apps with AI services.

The attack was linked to a hacking group called TeamPCP, with architects such attacks that target software libraries widely used by developers when writing their own code-Hacking group Lapsus$ also claimed responsibility for the breach.

A Mercor spokesperson said the company had moved promptly to contain further damage. —*Agencies*

NEW MILESTONE

Amul turnover rises 11% to over Rs 1 lakh crore

NEW DELHI, 5 APRIL

Dairy major Amul on Sunday said its total turnover rose 11 per cent in the last fiscal year to cross the Rs 1 lakh crore milestone on better demand for dairy products.

The Gujarat Cooperative Milk Marketing Federation Ltd (GCMMF) said the total turnover of the Amul brand crossed the Rs 1 lakh crore mark for the financial year 2025-26.

The turnover of GCMMF, which sells products under the Amul brand, grew 11.4 per cent to Rs 73,450 crore last fiscal from Rs 65,911 crore in the preceding financial year.

"The surge is powered by a massive product portfolio of more than 1,200 product packs, a vast distribution network, and a rapid adaptation to the evolving needs of modern consumers," GCMMF said.

The turnovers of the 18-member district cooperatives, which sell products under the Amul brand are not included in the GCMMF's revenue.

Ashokbhai Chaudhary, chairman of GCMMF, said, "Crossing the Rs 1 lakh crore brand turnover is a testament to the trust of millions of consumers and the tireless hard work of our 36 lakh dairy farmers."

Jayen Mehta, managing director of GCMMF, the federation is expanding the very definition of what a farmer-owned institution can achieve in the modern world.

"We are ensuring that the fruits of technology and global trade reach the hands of the producers," Mehta said.

GCMMF is the world's largest farmer-owned dairy cooperative with 3.6 million farmers, responsible for marketing Amul milk and milk products across 50+ countries.

It collects 31 million liters of milk every day and distributes annually over 24 billion packs of Amul products, which include Milk, Butter, Cheese, Ghee, and Ice cream, among others. —*PTI*

Shami sizzles, Pant dazzles as LSG beat Hyderabad

Shami bowled an astounding 18 dot balls to finish with 2 for 9

HYDERABAD, 5 APRIL

Mohammed Shami asked probing questions not only to Sunrisers Hyderabad batters but also to the national selection committee with an opening spell for ages, while skipper Rishabh Pant upped his game when it mattered to headline Lucknow Super Giants' thrilling five-wicket victory in an IPL match on Sunday.

In a spell that oozed skill and class in equal measure, Shami bowled an astounding 18 dot balls to finish with 2 for 9 in four overs, which largely became responsible for Sunrisers Hyderabad being restricted to 156 for 9.

LSG rode on Aiden Markram's 27-ball-45 and skipper Rishabh Pant's 50-ball-68 not out to surpass the target with one ball to spare.

The chase got a touch tricky towards the end with 9 needed off the final over, but Pant smote Jaydev Unadkat for two straight boundaries the second a forehand tennis-like slap before another lofted boundary over mid-off to finish the game in style.

It was an innings that had nine boundaries, and his choice of strokes was measured on a slowish track where SRH spinners Harsh Dubey and Shvang Kumar made the ball talk.

But it was Shami, the 35-year-old artist, who set up the match in the LSG's bowling Powerplay itself.

His scalp was the crack opening pair of Abhishek Sharma and Travis Head, dismissed off successive deliveries across two overs with different variations of slower deliveries. Shami was ably supported by young Prince Yadav (2/34 in 4 overs), whose outswinger (inswinger for Ishan Kishan) was the ball of the match. Having bowled dot balls worth as many as three maiden overs, Shami was replaced as an Impact Sub after the completion of 10 overs. And it was at this point that SRH did make some sort of a mini comeback.

After having their backs to the wall with a scorecard reading an abysmal 35 for 4 after the first 10, Klaasen and Reddy threw caution to the wind with the 'offense is the best defense' policy.

Lucknow Super Giants 160 for 5 (Pant 68*, Markram 45, Dubey 2-18) beat Sunrisers Hyderabad 156 for 9 (Klaasen 62, Reddy 56, Shami 2-9) by five wickets *—PTI*

KKR seek spark to halt slide against in-form PBKS

KOLKATA, 5 APRIL

A beleaguered and increasingly rudderless Kolkata Knight Riders will need a strong turnaround to halt their poor start when they face an in-form Punjab Kings in their IPL clash here on Monday.

The three-time champions may point to the absence of frontline pacers Mustafizur Rahman, Harshit Rana, Akash Deep and Matheesha Pathirana for their early struggles, but the larger issue lies in a flawed team strategy that has left them staring at a third successive defeat.

The decision not to retain Shreyas Iyer, who led them to the 2024 title, raised eyebrows, and it has only looked worse in hindsight. Iyer went on to vindicate himself by leading Punjab Kings to a runners-up finish in 2025, becoming the first captain to guide three different franchises Delhi Capitals (2020), KKR (champions 2024) and PBKS (2025) to the finals. In contrast, KKR endured a forgettable campaign last season, finishing eighth for the first time since 2009. Ajinkya Rahane, brought in as captain despite being out of favour in the T20 scheme of things, did silence critics to an extent by emerging as their leading run-getter. But the team's thinking, including the elevation of Abhishek Nayar as head coach in place of Chandrakant Pandit, has come under scrutiny. Instead, KKR's persistence with Sunil Narine, a franchise regular since 2012 despite his diminishing returns has raised questions.

Rain threat

Yet to open their account, embattled Kolkata Knight Riders could face an added challenge from the rain gods when they take on Punjab Kings in their IPL clash here on Monday.

According to the IMD weather bulletin, there is a high likelihood of rain impacting the match, which could also turn into a truncated affair.

With their match against Lucknow Super Giants next here, a game that also carries a rain forecast -- weather could further compound KKR's early-season worries.

Incidentally, KKR's corresponding home fixture against PBKS last season on April 26 was also hit by rain, with both teams forced to settle for a point each.

Match starts: 7.30 pm. *—PTI*

Win against GT will boost Parag's confidence: Irfan Pathan

Former India pacer Irfan Pathan reckons the bold decisions taken by Riyan Parag at the death in Rajasthan Royals' thrilling win over Gujarat Titans will significantly boost his confidence as a leader. Parag, who took over RR's captaincy this season, made a key tactical call in the final moments, handing Jofra Archer the 19th over while entrusting Tushar Deshpande with the last one. "This was the best game of the season so far. It was very important for Rajasthan that Riyan Parag commands that respect while leading the side," Pathan said on JioStar. "He made that difficult call in the last over, and that decision went in favour of Rajasthan, which will give him a lot of confidence as a leader. He went to Jofra Archer to bowl that 19th over, and generally, you go with your more experienced bowler in the penultimate over."

AFC U-20 Women's AC 2026: India loses to Australia

THAILAND, 5 APRIL

India slumped to a 0-5 defeat against Australia, recording its second consecutive loss in the AFC Under-20 Women's Asian Cup 2026 on Sunday in Thailand. Skye Halmarick bagged a hat-trick with Danella Butrus and Daisy Brown netting one goal each to send the Young Matildas to the quarterfinals. This was Australia's second win on the trot after it beat Chinese Taipei 5-0 in their tournament opener. India began the first half on a bright note, which even saw Anju Chanu's long-range effort in the 17th minute from a free-kick whizz over the crossbar. However, soon later, Australia thought it had scored from a free-kick, but the referee disallowed it after Avaani Prakash, who has Indian lineage, was adjudged to have obstructed the wall. But in the 38th minute, Australia did take the lead through Halmarick, who sent India goalkeeper Devi the wrong way. Cindy had brought down Butrus to concede the spot kick.*—PTI*

ISL 2025-26: DELHI BEATS KERALA BLASTERS

NEW DELHI, 5 APRIL

Mohammed Aimen was all of 15 years old when he joined the Kerala Blasters academy in 2018. He spent the next eight years there, successfully graduating from the youth ranks into the senior team.

Having switched to Sporting Club Delhi at the start of the 2025-26 Indian Super League (ISL) season, a quirk of fate saw the forward produce his first-ever goal for his new club in the fixture against his former side on Sunday.

With Matija Babovic also finding the net in stoppage time, the host sealed a much-needed 2-0 win at the Jawaharlal Nehru Stadium here. Blasters were reduced to 10 men when defender Aibanbha Dohling committed a rash challenge in the 85th minute.

Having looked the more threatening of the two teams in the first half, Delhi deserved its lead in the 36th minute.

The move for the goal began with right-back Lamgoulen Semkholun passing the ball to centre-back Rafael Alves inside Delhi's half and sprinting forward in search of an opening.

Meenakshi, Jaismine move to SFs of Asian Boxing C'ships

ULAANBAATAR , 5 APRIL

Indian women's boxing contingent continued its impressive run at the Asian Boxing Championships as reigning world champions Meenakshi Hooda and Jaismine Lamboria stormed to the semifinals here on Sunday.

The pair's wins ensured the entire Indian women's contingent would finish on the podium. In the men's section, triumphs for Lokesh, Akash, and Harsh Choudhary also made their way to the last-four stage.

Meenakshi produced a composed and commanding display to defeat Japan's Yuka Sadamatsu by a unanimous 5-0 decision, controlling the women's 48kg category bout with sharp combinations and ring awareness.

Jaismine matched that intensity in the 57kg division, outclassing China's Ziyi Chen with an equally dominant 5-0 verdict to book her place in the semifinals.

In the men's section, Lokesh (85kg) booked his place in the next round with a clinical 5-0 win over Korea's Gichae Kim, showcasing control and precision throughout the bout. Akash (75kg) followed with a dominant 5-0 victory against Turkmenistan's Yhlas Bagtyyarov, while Harsh Choudhary (90kg) delivered a strong performance to overcome Kyrgyz Republic's Tynystan Alybaev and move into the semifinals.

India now has six boxers in the men's semifinals. Ankush (80kg), however, bowed out after a loss to Jordan's Hussein Iashaish. *—PTI*

- The pair's wins ensured the entire Indian women's contingent would finish on the podium. In the men's section, triumphs for Lokesh, Akash, and Harsh Choudhary also made their way to the last-four stage

DRAVID AND KUMBLE HONOURED

Karnataka State Cricket Association (KSCA) President Venkatesh Prasad, former cricketers Rahul Dravid, Anil Kumble, and others, during a dedication ceremony of two stands named after Dravid and Kumble at the M Chinnaswamy Stadium, in Bengaluru, Karnataka, Sunday *–PTI*

Messi scores, but Inter Miami only gets a 2-2 tie with Austin

MIAMI, 5 APRIL

Lionel Messi scored on the long-awaited opening night in his new home stadium. And Luis Suarez found a way to tie things up late in the second half.

It was good enough to salvage a point for Inter Miami.

Messi scored on a header in the 10th minute, Suarez hammered home a volley in the 82nd minute, and Inter Miami escaped with a 2-2 tie against Austin FC in the defending MLS champions' first match at their still-under-construction stadium near Miami International Airport on Saturday night.

Inter Miami (3-1-2) is now unbeaten in its last five MLS matches, and Austin (1-2-3) is now winless in its last four contests. MLS Commissioner Don Garber was at the match, lauding the work that David Beckham, who picked Miami 13 years ago, did to get to this day. Inter Miami is in its seventh MLS season, its third with Messi, but has played home matches in Fort Lauderdale until now.

Garber touted the stadium opening as the latest sign of growth for MLS.

"I think our best days are still ahead," Garber said. "David shone a light on our league, and Leo's taking that torch, and he's showing it around. And we're getting calls from players around the world."

The Herons never led; Austin took a 1-0 lead on Guilherme Biro's goal — the first ever at Nu Stadium — in the sixth minute, and the visitors went up 2-1 when speedy reserve Jayden Nelson scored in the 53rd minute.

Messi and Suarez both got tying goals, and Inter Miami missed some chances for a potential winner in the final minutes. *—PTI*

Kochhar finishes 5th at int'l Series Japan

CHIBA, 5 APRIL

India's Karandeep Kochhar hit a late hat-trick of birdies in the thrilling fourth round to finish fifth at the International Series Japan, here Sunday. Australia's Travis Smyth clinched the title with an eagle on the last hole at the Caledonian Golf Club. Kochhar remained bogey-free on the final day after a tumultuous third round and hit birdies on the 4th, 16th, 17th, and 18th holes to finish the tournament with 12-under 272, three shots behind winner Smyth. Meanwhile, Smyth's dream run continued when he made an eagle putt on the par-five 18th to sensationally win the tournament by one. In a riveting finish, he drained a 20-footer to narrowly avoid a play-off with Thailand's Pavit Tangkamolprasert and Ryosuke from Japan.*—PTI*

Djokovic pulls out of Monte Carlo Masters

PARIS, 5 APRIL

The Monte Carlo Masters kicks off this weekend, marking the first major stop on the European clay circuit.

And several high-profile names are notably absent from the entry list. Top-10 players Novak Djokovic and Taylor Fritz are among those who have pulled out of the Masters 1000 event in recent days, while the likes of Ben Shelton and Tommy Paul opted against entering altogether.

Djokovic's absence means he has competed in just two tournaments this year, the Australian Open and Indian Wells. This marks the first time the Serbian powerhouse has bypassed the Monte Carlo Masters since 2011. Last year, he was eliminated in his opening match by Alejandro Tabilo.

From a British standpoint, Jack Draper has also withdrawn from the tournament.

This appears to be a precautionary measure, however, as the world No. 25 continues his recovery from an arm injury. Draper has spent the week honing his game and building his fitness ahead of the coming months. *—PTI*

GRANADA WORLD CUP OPENER

Indian shooters set sights on success

GRANADA, 5 APRIL

Indian pistol and rifle shooters will head into the season-opening ISSF World Cup, beginning here on Monday, with a firm resolve to extend the dominance they displayed last year when they set new benchmarks and excelled across virtually every competition they entered.

After a disappointing start to the season at the Shotgun World Cup in Morocco, where India endured a forgettable outing, the focus now shifts to the pistol and rifle events disciplines in which the country has traditionally excelled.

Manu Bhaker *–PTI*

The team will be keen to compete with a renewed winning mindset, bolstered by the presence of some of the nation's finest shooters, including Olympians Rhythm Sangwan and Anjum Moudgil, and Mehuli Ghosh. However, the squad will miss the experience of double Olympic medallist Manu Bhaker and world champion Samrat Rana, who are not part of the contingent. As per the national federation's policy of rotation to provide opportunities to all members of the national squad, celebrated pistol shooters Bhaker, Suruchi Inder Singh, and Samrat, among others, will feature in the pistol/rifle World Cup in May in Munich, where virtually the who's who of Indian shooting is expected to be in action. However, there is no shortage of star power in the squad heading into the season's first pistol/rifle World Cup. Among them, pistol shooter Sangwan will be eager to put behind a series of near misses at World Cups over the past two years, as she eyes a podium finish to strengthen her case for Asian Games selection. *—PTI*